

**GOP MUST GO ■ BUSH'S RADICAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY**

NOVEMBER 20, 2006

# The American Conservative

## Who Killed Conservatism?



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## GOOD OLD DAYS

When Russell Kirk came to Harvard to address its 1970-71 Institute of Politics "Symposium on the Coevolution of British and American Conservatism," he shared Daniel McCarthy's concern that few undergraduates would have heard of or read the founding documents of the conservative tradition (Nov. 6). But after a few days, Kirk confessed he was encouraged by the curricular prominence, at least at Harvard, of Burckhardt, Gibbon, and Hume, if not Burke, Smith, and Hayek or Mises. Departing, he pronounced his delight in the institutional continuity of a place where in coming to political equilibrium with the Puritan tradition, the Enlightenment had yielded so much timber for the framers of *The Federalist*.

Kirk was preceded as a speaker by M. Stanton Evans and followed Bill Rusher. The few who came to hear them and a half-dozen others were rapt, but only a handful were politically active as young Republicans. It is curious that while *soi disant* libertarians, Randoids, and YAF luminaries introduced themselves, as was the custom before discus-

sion with the speakers began, neither I, nor the symposium's other convener, George Nash, the historian of conservatism whom McCarthy mentions, can recall any Harvard contemporaries now famed as neoconservatives bothering to attend, though the works of a certain philosopher from the University of Chicago were naturally incorporated into the symposium by our faculty advisor, professor, and later senator, Moynihan. I suspect Kirk and Strauss would alike be blissfully relieved to find their names scarcely figure in the parody of conservative thought booming forth on contemporary talk radio and yak TV.

RUSSELL SEITZ

Cambridge, Mass.

## NO FAITH IN WAR

Thanks to Doug Bandow for the article questioning my fellow evangelicals in America (Oct 23). Evangelicals, along with many others, were deceived as to the true motivations of the government in going to war in Iraq.

The great act of killing must force all to examine carefully any justifications for it. This alone would end threats against Iran and lead to repentance on Iraq. Were the deaths of all these people justified? Was attention paid to the reasons given to start the killing? Was the malicious intent of the opponents proved beyond a shadow of a doubt—or even close? To all these questions, the answer is no.

ROBERT BYERS

Toronto, Ontario

## TRUE BELIEVERS

I appreciate your magazine's commitment to principle. I subscribed to and read *National Review*, *American Spectator*, and *World* during the '90s and into this decade.

Now I find *The Nation* to be a more reliable and intellectually well-founded journal than those that seem to have abandoned themselves to blind party

boosterism. The intellectual prostitution and pimping is unseemly and disconcerting. How can people you used to respect when they criticized the Democrats have become so slavish, even in some cases sounding positively Soviet in timbre?

Isn't that a sad place for a conservative to find himself? But then, I've always thought that when truth and manmade ideology clash, the choice ought to be for the truth.

About the only place we differ is on the matter of immigration and rights for immigrants. I think that the great majority of them are being pushed away from their natural propensity to support conservative values by conservatives' distrust of them, which leads to *de facto* discrimination. They only gravitate towards liberalism because liberals defend them, for on just about every other issue their practical experience makes them conservative.

In any case, whatever your views, continue to value the truth. There's no higher calling.

MAX SOUTHALL

via e-mail

## TAC THERAPY

I would like to suggest that a future issue of *The American Conservative* be devoted to how we can avoid giving in to despair and hopelessness when we see how our Republic is crumbling all around us. In other words, how can we continue to stand for what is right and live responsible lives in a dying age when all seems lost?

MARK VEHOSKI

via e-mail

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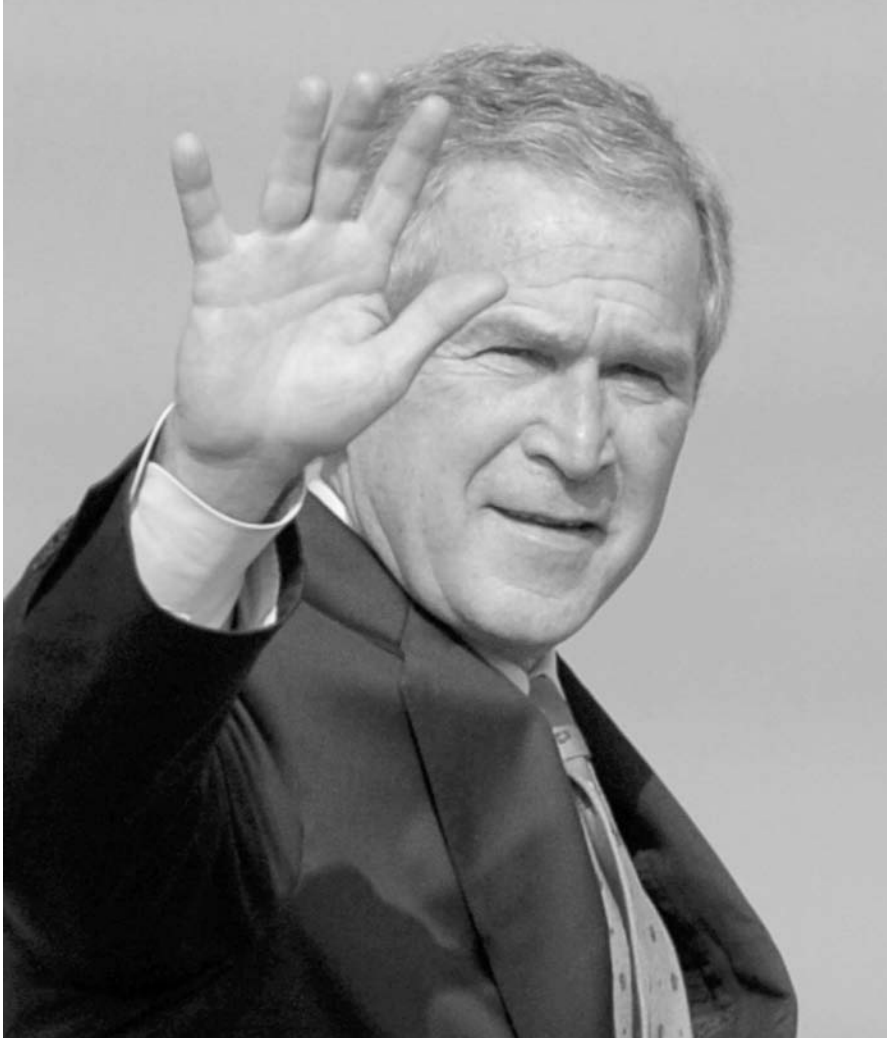
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[IRAQ]

## WORDS FAIL

Bush press secretary Tony Snow now asserts that his boss's Iraq strategy is "not a stay the course policy." Americans should immediately forget that Bush was repeating the phrase throughout the summer whenever he wanted to contrast his Iraq plan with "cut and run" Democrats of War Party lore. But the Bush policy of campaigning by slogans seems to have run into a cul de sac. Last year, a political consultant advised the White House that Americans would continue to back the war if they thought there was a "plan for victory." The administration listened and followed the advice.

No, it didn't develop a plan for victory—which is impossible given the nature of Iraq, the Middle East, and the United States. But it did pretend to. The White House staff even ordered up a huge banner with the words "Plan for Victory" emblazoned over and over and deployed it as a speech backdrop. When photographed from any angle, Bush would have the word "victory" in the background.

Unfortunately, this had little impact in Iraq, where the carnage accelerated. Apparently it was unpersuasive even to Bush's political base, so it was abandoned.

We don't yet know what the White House will come up with to replace "stay the course." What is needed is not a new slogan but a new policy: one that recognizes that a "democratic" and unified Iraq is not in the cards, that America will not retain military bases in Iraq, and that the war was a blunder. It would be wonderful if that painful and necessary process could begin before 2009.

[MEDIA]

## EXTREMIST MAKEOVER

TAC was interested to learn that in the current issue of *Foreign Policy* Joshua Muravchik has penned an "Operation



Comeback" memo for the neocons, an outline of how the storied group could improve a reputation badly soiled by the Iraq catastrophe. Not since Krushchev's 1956 speech denouncing Stalin provoked a collective bed-wetting among America's Communists has a political faction been so undermined by real-world events. No group in American history agitated for a senseless war longer, or more successfully, than the neocons campaigned against Saddam. George W. Bush finally came through for them. But as Muravchik acknowledges with understandable understatement, Bush's policies have achieved "uncertain success."

Muravchik refuses—just as did most Communists, when confronted with their doctrine's real-world record—to acknowledge that anything was wrong with the idea itself. Invading a sovereign country on the pretext of distorted intelligence in order to "transform the political culture" of the Middle East was just fine. But the neocons are perhaps guilty of being "glib about how Iraqis would greet liberation." And they were overly enthusiastic about Don Rumsfeld's technological transformation of the military, which spared them the task of fighting for higher defense budgets and a larger army.

So how should the group rebrand themselves? Boldly, Muravchik calls for

neocon commissars to "volunteer" to take over the training of U.S. Foreign Service officers "in the war of ideas"—and ensure that one "graduate" of this training program is assigned to every U.S. overseas post. And of course, prepare for the next war—Muravchik believes we have to bomb Iran soon, an idea whose consequences are probably worse than invading Iraq. And finally, recruit Joe Lieberman into the Republican Party, so he can run with McCain or Giuliani.

Maybe it's just us, but given the neocon record, we doubt that hiding in Lieberman's shadow or volunteering to give ideological training to U.S. diplomats will be enough for a successful makeover. A sincere apology to the American people and the Iraqi people would be a better starting point.

[POLITICS]

## A PALER SHADE OF BLUE

Eager to scare their base to the polls on election day, Republicans have taken to reciting the roll call of left-wing Democrats who would gain power if the liberal party won a majority: Nancy Pelosi, John Conyers, Charlie Rangel. Rarely do they mention Jack Davis.

Davis, who is leading Republican Congressman Thomas Reynolds of New

York, is not a liberal bogeyman. He is tough on illegal immigration, against amnesty, critical of free trade, opposed to abortion, and supportive of the Second Amendment—more Buchanan than Pelosi.

Davis isn't the only potential Democratic pickup who fails to conform to the GOP caricature. Zack Space, the Democrat running for disgraced Congressman Bob Ney's seat in Ohio, opposes guest workers, wants to build a security fence along the southwest border, and belongs to the National Rifle Association. Another Democrat running in Ohio, John Cranley, has been attacking Republican incumbent Steve Chabot for voting to amnesty illegal aliens. And Ken Lucas is looking to reclaim his House seat in Kentucky—he was one of the most conservative Democrats in Congress.

Not all of the Democrats running for the Senate are conventional liberals, either. The addition of Harold Ford in Tennessee, James Webb in Virginia, or Bob Casey in Pennsylvania would probably not imperil the confirmation of conservative judges. In many of these races, Republican liberal-baiting will fail. The Democratic leadership may still lean heavily to the left, but many of the party's most promising candidates in this election cycle are surprisingly conservative.

#### [IMMIGRATION]

### ELECT A NEW PEOPLE

In the Golden State, it is fashionable to hate Tan Nguyen. The Republican challenger to California Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez raised this ire when a member of his staff sent a letter to 14,000 people in the district with this allegedly threatening message: illegal immigrants will be punished if they break another law by voting.

Hispanic groups have predictably denounced Nguyen, but he hasn't gotten much support from his erstwhile friends

either. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, hoping Latino voters will forgive his past support for the Minutemen, described the letter as "a hate crime." Orange County Republican leaders have called on Nguyen, himself an immigrant from Vietnam, to drop out of the race.

Beneath all the outrage, however, is the fact that illegal-alien voting is a problem. They may have even helped the incumbent get to Congress—ballots cast by illegals were an issue in Sanchez's disputed 1996 victory over Republican Bob Dornan. And just this year, a California Democrat was caught on tape telling an illegal alien he did not need to prove his legal status to vote. But that kind of behavior is deemed far less worthy of investigation than a letter pointing out that voting by illegals—is illegal.

#### [LIBERTY]

### HABEAS CORPSE

In war there are inevitably POWs. But what happens when the war is metaphorical and the prisoners quite real? President Bush provided an answer on Oct. 17, when he signed the Military Commission bill that deprives alleged "enemy combatants" of *habeas corpus* and Geneva Conventions protections. This war has no definable end, and our foes are indistinguishable from criminals, but the accused will have the rights neither of POWs nor defendants.

The new law does more than just remove civilian courts' jurisdiction over foreigners alleged to be terrorists—it also permits the use in military tribunals of evidence obtained from torture. And it leaves the question of who counts as an "enemy combatant" to the president's discretion. President Bush has said, in so many words on so many occasions, that our foes hate us for our freedoms. Evidently he believes that—and thinks that by curtailing hard-won legal protections, we'll assuage the jihadis' fury. ■

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*The American Conservative*, Vol. 5, No. 22, November 20, 2006 (ISSN 1540-966X). Reg. U.S. Pat. & Tm. Off. TAC is published 24 times per year, biweekly (except for January and August) for \$49.97 per year by The American Conservative, LLC, 1300 Wilson Blvd., Suite 120, Arlington, VA, 22209. Periodicals postage paid at Arlington, VA, and additional mailing offices. Printed in the United States of America. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The American Conservative*, P.O. Box 9030, Maple Shade, NJ 08052-9030.

Subscription rates: \$49.97 per year (24 issues) in the U.S., \$54.97 in Canada (U.S. funds), and \$69.97 other foreign (U.S. funds). Back issues: \$6.00 (prepaid) per copy in USA, \$7.00 in Canada (U.S. funds).

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Inquiries and letters to the editor should be sent to [letters@amconmag.com](mailto:letters@amconmag.com). For advertising sales or editorial call 703-875-7600.

This issue went to press on October 26, 2006.  
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# GOP Must Go

Next week Americans will vote for candidates who have spent much of their campaigns addressing state and local issues. But no future historian will linger over the ideas put forth for improving schools or directing funds to highway projects.

The meaning of this election will be interpreted in one of two ways: the American people endorsed the Bush presidency or they did what they could to repudiate it. Such an interpretation will be simplistic, even unfairly so. Nevertheless, the fact that will matter is the raw number of Republicans and Democrats elected to the House and Senate.

It should surprise few readers that we think a vote that is seen—in America and the world at large—as a decisive “No” vote on the Bush presidency is the best outcome. We need not dwell on George W. Bush’s failed effort to jam a poorly disguised amnesty for illegal aliens through Congress or the assaults on the Constitution carried out under the pretext of fighting terrorism or his administration’s endorsement of torture. Faced on Sept. 11, 2001 with a great challenge, President Bush made little effort to understand who had attacked us and why—thus ignoring the prerequisite for crafting an effective response. He seemingly did not want to find out, and he had staffed his national-security team with people who either did not want to know or were committed to a prefabricated answer.

As a consequence, he rushed America into a war against Iraq, a war we are now losing and cannot win, one that has done far more to strengthen Islamist terrorists than anything they could possibly have done for themselves. Bush’s decision to seize Iraq will almost surely leave behind a broken state divided into warring ethnic enclaves, with hundreds of thousands killed and maimed and thousands more thirsting for revenge against the country that crossed the ocean to attack them. The invasion failed at every level: if securing Israel was part of the administration’s calculation—as the record suggests it was for several of his top aides—the result is also clear: the strengthening of Iran’s hand in the Persian Gulf, with a reach up to Israel’s northern border, and the elimination of the most powerful Arab state that might stem Iranian regional hegemony.

The war will continue as long as Bush is in office, for no other reason than the feckless president can’t face the embarrassment of admitting defeat. The chain of events is not complete: Bush, having learned little from his mistakes, may yet seek to embroil America in new wars against Iran and Syria.

Meanwhile, America’s image in the world, its capacity to persuade others that its interests are common interests, is

lower than it has been in memory. All over the world people look at Bush and yearn for this country—which once symbolized hope and justice—to be humbled. The professionals in the Bush administration (and there are some) realize the damage his presidency has done to American prestige and diplomacy. But there is not much they can do.

There may be little Americans can do to atone for this presidency, which will stain our country’s reputation for a long time. But the process of recovering our good name must begin somewhere, and the logical place is in the voting booth this Nov. 7. If we are fortunate, we can produce a result that is seen—in Washington, in Peoria, and in world capitals from Prague to Kuala Lumpur—as a repudiation of George W. Bush and the war of aggression he launched against Iraq.

We have no illusions that a Democratic majority would be able to reverse Bush’s policies, even if they had a plan to. We are aware that on a host of issues the Democrats are further from *TAC*’s positions than the Republicans are. The House members who blocked the Bush amnesty initiative are overwhelmingly Republican. But immigration has not played out in an entirely partisan manner this electoral season: in many races the Democrat has been more conservative than the open-borders, Big Business Republican. A Democratic House and Senate is, in our view, a risk immigration reformers should be willing to take. We can’t conceive of a newly elected Democrat in a swing district who would immediately alienate his constituency by voting for amnesty. We simply don’t believe a Democratic majority would give the Republicans such an easy route to return to power. Indeed, we anticipate that Democratic office holders will follow the polls on immigration just as Republicans have, and all the popular momentum is towards greater border enforcement.

On Nov. 7, the world will be watching as we go to the polls, seeking to ascertain whether the American people have the wisdom to try to correct a disastrous course. Posterity will note too if their collective decision is one that captured the attention of historians—that of a people voting, again and again, to endorse a leader taking a country in a catastrophic direction. The choice is in our hands. ■

# Judgment Day

In endorsing Bush for re-election, not a popular view at *TAC*, I gave two reasons. First: "Bush and Kerry are both wrong on Iraq, NAFTA, the WTO, open-borders,

affirmative action, amnesty, free trade, foreign aid, and Big Government. But, while Bush is right on taxes, judges, sovereignty, and values, Kerry is right on nothing."

As witnesses in my defense, I call John Roberts and Sam Alito. But there was another motive for backing Bush:

The cakewalk crowd cannot be permitted to get out from under their disaster. ... They stampeded Bush and the nation into this war, and they should be made to see it through to the end and to preside over the American withdrawal or retreat. Only thus will they be held accountable. Only thus can their neo-Jacobin ideology be discredited in America's eyes. It is essential for this country and the conservative movement that neoconservatism be repudiated formally by the Republican Party and exorcised. They must clean up the mess they made, themselves, in full public view.

Judgment day appears at hand. For the neo-Wilsonian foreign policy Bush embraced after 9/11 is everywhere collapsing in ruin. It consisted of three components.

First was the concept of preventive war. The Iraq invasion was launched to bring down Saddam before he could strike us with his weapons of mass destruction and to replace his odious regime with a pro-American democracy that would serve as model for the Middle East. The road to American-Israeli hegemony, we were told, "runs through Baghdad."

With the war having lasted longer than World War I, World War II in Europe, or the Korean War, Iraq is now sinking into sectarian and ethnic bloodletting that could lead to a breakup of the country and a vast terrorist base camp in Anbar province. For that we have paid with 2,800 dead, 20,000 wounded, and \$300 billion.

The second component of Bush's policy was unveiled in his 2002 State of the Union. Naming Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as an "axis of evil," the president declared: "The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons."

Neocons hailed Bush as the Churchill of his generation. But the speech was a blunder of the first magnitude, fracturing his domestic and foreign coalitions in the war on terror and alerting Iran and North Korea to what he had in mind, though Bush had neither the authority nor any plan to wage war on either. The Bush Doctrine proved to be an American bluff that has now been raised and called.

North Korea has withdrawn from the nonproliferation treaty and tested a nuclear device. Iran has sent IAEA inspectors packing and declared it will never give up its right to enrich uranium. Bush has meekly accepted what he called unacceptable.

Contending, contra history, that America can never be safe until the world is democratic, Bush introduced the third element: a crusade for global democracy. The traditional U.S. policy

of nonintervention in the politics, quarrels, and conflicts of nations that did not threaten us was declared obsolete.

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Rose Revolution in Georgia did bring to power democrats who sought to join the EU and NATO. Yet two years on, the Orange Revolution is over, Kiev is moving back toward Moscow, Georgia is under virtual blockade, and Russia is rolling up the NGOs it looks upon as America's agents in its capital city.

As for the elections Bush demanded in the Middle East, they advanced the fortunes of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Moqtada al-Sadr in Iraq.

Bush then went for the war option, green-lighting Israel to smash Hezbollah. Israel elected instead to smash Lebanon, vitiating the fruits of the Cedar Revolution, altarpiece of the Bush democracy project in the Middle East.

Neoconservatism has thus given us a bloodshed unending in Iraq, inflamed the Islamic world, divided America from Europe, antagonized Russia, and probably effected our early expulsion from Central Asia.

The "benevolent global hegemony" we were to exercise in this, our "unipolar era," has proven a mirage.

Hubristic and arrogant, the neocons disparaged history and treated America not as a land to be loved, protected, and preserved but as a means to their visionary and neo-Trotskyite ends. Ideologues to the core, they did not see the world as it is, nor perceive America's truest national interests. Boasting of their superior intelligence, they turned out to be simpletons who worshipped at the altar of power.

Now we must find a way out of the mess they have left our country in. ■

# Good-bye to All That

A former *National Review* trustee surveys the wreckage of contemporary conservatism.

By Austin W. Bramwell

UNTIL RECENTLY, it has been almost impossible for me to speak candidly about the conservative movement, for it was my strange fate to serve as director and later trustee of the movement's flagship journal, *National Review*. Earlier this year, at William F. Buckley's request, I resigned both positions. I can therefore now declare what perhaps has oft been thought but never, at least not often enough, expressed. Notwithstanding conservatives' belief that they, in contrast to their partisan opponents, have thought deeply about the challenges facing the United States, it is they who have become unserious.

The unseriousness began not long after 9/11. On Oct. 15, 2001, for example, *National Review*—still the most powerful brand in conservative opinion, whose pronouncements the movement must either accept or at least refrain from challenging—wrote, in an editorial entitled “At War: Defining Victory”:

The logic of a ‘war on terrorism’ points beyond itself. ... The phrase is meant to suggest that our hostility is not confined to those people who can be proved to have materially aided the attacks of September 11. It encompasses all those who mean to do our people harm. ... Bombing bin Laden, if we find him, will not end [this war]. Nor will overthrowing the Taliban. Victory requires either changing the regimes of Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya,

and Sudan, or frightening them enough to change their behavior towards us.

“Defining Victory” describes the post-9/11 world in terms that have since become familiar. First, it insists on a war that has no definite enemy and no foreseeable end. Short of one-world despotism or universal brotherhood, the U.S. cannot literally defeat “all those who mean to do our people harm.” To trim the hyperbole, *NR* goes on to name five examples of potential enemies (plus, in later editorials, Saudi Arabia) but does not explain how the list was generated or whether it is even complete. The reader gathers only that we should threaten or go to war with an unspecified number of troublesome nations.

Second, the editors use the term “war” in a purely figurative sense. At the time of the editorial, the U.S. was not at war with Syria, Sudan, or Iran nor, realistically speaking, with any other nation on the list. No matter how vulnerable or despised, no Muslim nation can be turned into a sacrificial substitute for bin Laden. Nor, no matter how often incanted, can the phrase “at war” be made to describe an actual state of affairs. A rhetorical bludgeon designed to compel assent to certain policies, it begs the question of whether war is advisable in the first place.

Third, “Defining Victory” does not identify a *casus belli*. Neither Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, nor Sudan attacked us on

9/11. Later debate would focus on the legitimacy of preventive war as a defense against future threats. All foreign nations, however, by definition pose hypothetical threats; at some point, those threats become so remote, trivial, or contingent that preventive war cannot be distinguished from an aggressive war of domination. By urging belligerence against nations with no known designs—to say nothing of any capacity—for harming the U.S., “Defining Victory” surely advocated crossing that point.

Finally, the editorial defines “victory” in terms of a goal—regime change—that war advances only incidentally. War by itself cannot cause regime change. To overthrow and replace a government militarily, one must either invade and occupy a country (a technique that works best when the occupier has made a policy of slaughtering civilians *en masse*, as in Dresden or Hiroshima) or else so punish the civilian population that they rise up against their government. By saying, incoherently, that the United States was “at war” with a list of regimes, *NR* gave no indication of what policies it was actually touting.

In sum, *NR* declared that we were “at war” when we were not, for reasons that it did not specify, against enemies that it could not define, and to achieve goals that war does not advance. “Defining Victory” dresses up as policy but inchoate thirst for vengeance against someone, anyone who hates us. *How nations sink, by darling schemes*



*oppressed / when vengeance listens to the fools request!* On Oct. 15, 2001, *National Review* had no position on post-9/11 foreign policy.

Nor did it find a position thereafter. In December 2001 *NR* declared:

Even Osama bin Laden, whose humiliation and death is one of our prime war aims, is only a pustule on the diseased body of the Middle East. After Afghanistan comes Iraq. ... After it comes Saudi Arabia ...

A fortnight later:

If Saddam Hussein were toppled and Saudi Arabia reformed or restructured, the Middle East would be emptied of many of its poisonous humors, like a bathtub when the plug is pulled away.

Upon a metaphor and a simile—the diseased body and the wet bathtub—did *National Review* hang all its post-9/11 prescriptions. Yet the editors never explained what these figures actually meant. Presumably, the theory to which they allude is that (a) the Middle East suffers from certain conditions (b) that cause threats to the U.S. to emerge and (c) that by removing those conditions the threats will cease.

Thus spelled out, however, the theory behind the metaphors provides little policy guidance. First, what conditions cause threats to emerge? Lack of democracy? The world is full of non-democracies, very few of which actually threaten us. Lack of a sound ideology? Crazy ideologies are ubiquitous, even (perhaps especially) in democracies. Sophisticated Westerners can't even agree on what democracy is. Islam itself? It is a major world religion that comes in diverse forms and which American policy cannot mould to its liking as if it were soft wax. Tyranny? Philosophers have agreed that democracy itself is a kind of tyranny.

Second, what threats emerge from the Middle East and how do the alleged conditions cause them? Terrorism? It flourishes in democracies, especially under conditions of occupation, no matter that the occupier or the occupied is democratic. Democracy may even worsen terrorism as it tends to arm terrorist groups politically as well as technologically. Nuclear proliferation? Many nations, of all ideologies, religions, and political systems, seek nuclear weapons, largely as guarantors of their security. Hostility to our ally Israel? It is Arab dictators who strike deals with Israel; anti-Zionism, by contrast, is a demotic passion.

Finally, how do you change the alleged conditions that cause the alleged threats? By what psychological techniques, for example, do you cause people to accept a new ideology? Brainwashing? Relentless propaganda? Feats of strength? And how do you go about establishing a democracy in the first place?

Each of these questions alludes to a serious policy debate. Possibly, by speaking only in metaphor, *National Review* was announcing that it had resolved them already and no longer needed to be troubled. If so, the editors concealed their reasoning in the dunest haze. *NR*'s subsequent editorials offered one nebulous metaphor after another. After curing diseased bodies and draining bathtubs, *NR* was changing "the political map of the Middle East," erecting a "new model for Middle Eastern governance," "transforming the geopolitical balance in the Middle East," and establishing a liberal "beachhead." Bodies, bathtubs, swamps, maps, models, balances, beachheads: each metaphor conceals a paucity of analysis.

Despite their vacuity, the metaphors have inspired specific policies. In defending the invasion and occupation of Iraq (and possible attacks on Syria or Iran),

conservatives invoke 9/11 with astonishing alacrity. I once heard an *NR* senior editor, a man revered for his high-mindedness, begin his defense of the Iraq occupation by reminding the audience that on 9/11 "they" attacked "us." In his mind as in others', the invasion of Iraq has so inescapable a connection to 9/11 that only a traitor or fool would deny it.

But the movement's leaders have no more defined the connection between Iraq and terrorism than they have defined the war on terror. While acknowledging that the occupation of Iraq may be increasing the short-term risk of anti-American terrorism, *NR* nonetheless argued more recently:

If we prevail [in Iraq], we will have destroyed a dictatorship supportive of terrorism and Arab radicalism and replaced it, we hope, with a government opposed to both of those things. That will be a significant step forward in the War on Terror. ... If we succeed in creating a stable, democratic Iraqi state, it will be clear that the terrorists are opposed not so much to the 'crusaders' and 'occupiers' as to the legitimate aspirations of Muslims in the Middle East. [Quoting John Negroponte] '[S]hould the Iraqi people prevail in establishing a stable political and security environment, the jihadists will be perceived to have failed, and fewer jihadists will leave Iraq determined to carry on the fight elsewhere.'

Never mind the conflation of "Arab radicalism"—presumably a reference to Ba'athism—with bin Laden's Muslim jihadism (how would discrediting Saddam's ideology discourage bin Laden's?), the allusion to Hussein rewarding the families of Palestinian suicide bombers (how does terrorism in Israel threaten the United States?), or the assumption that foreign terrorists

are driving the insurgency in Iraq (if Iraqis hate the relatively benign Americans, why would they turn over their country to a bunch of foreign wackos?). Let us observe only that the conservative movement's best argument for staying in Iraq is that jihadists "will be perceived" differently, for "it will be clear" that they are harming Muslims at large. In short, if all goes well, the occupation of Iraq might just produce a useful propaganda victory. War as propaganda: surely this is the thinking of clownish dictators rather than mature analysts.

To justify the long-term occupation of a foreign country, the supposed propaganda victory must bring overwhelming benefits to Americans. Consider, however, what must happen before Iraqi democracy can make us safer from terrorism. First, Iraqi democracy must exist. *National Review*, by offering the occasional potpourri of new tactics that might or might not improve the situation, poses as the voice of maturity (neither unrealistic like the neocons nor defeatist like the cut-and-run Democrats) in the debate over whether Iraq can be salvaged. To the extent, however, that *NR* dares to name what forces are actually driving events in Iraq, it offers either blandishments ("we must keep the political process on track as the key to making progress on the ground") or such naïvetes as the theory that peace and stable government have a chance in Iraq because that is what Iraqis ultimately want. Alas, if people always got what they wanted, the whole world would be well-governed. A nation cannot afford to premise its policies on the universal hope for something better.

Second, Muslims must recognize Iraqi democracy as such. Accurately perceiving "democracy," however, requires a degree of information and political sophistication beyond most people, Muslims included. Conservatives complain, for example, that the media give Ameri-

cans a distorted view of Iraq. Surely the Muslim media would do even worse. Most people around the globe, after all, dispute that even the United States is a democracy on the perfectly plausible theory (given lack of information) that Bush simply crowned himself president.

Yet even if fully informed, Muslims may still not perceive Iraq as a "democracy." Scholars can't even agree on the meaning the word. Joseph Schumpeter, the most penetrating modern theorist of democracy, argued in essence that "democracy" is a misnomer, while economist Kenneth Arrow won a Nobel Prize for proving (on one interpretation) that it is literally impossible for a democratic process to satisfy all relevant normative criteria of legitimacy. Meanwhile, the vast majority of people (what George Orwell in 1984 called the "proles," or the 85 percent of the world so uninterested in politics as to have no ideology whatsoever) have not even the most basic grasp of the concepts of democracy or legitimacy. Even if everything in Mesopotamia came up roses, therefore, Muslims may never see the Iraqi government as legitimate. To do so, they would need the minds of angels, not men.

Finally, before Iraqi democracy can cure terrorism, Muslims in general, and Muslim extremists in particular, must infer from "democracy exists in Iraq" that "terrorism is wrong." But even assuming that Muslims think logically, surely it is too much to ask them to commit a non sequitur. Democracy in Iraq will leave in place any number of grievances—our occupation of Muslim lands, our support for Israel, and our continued alliance with Muslim dictators—any one of which may continue to inspire terrorism. Ironically, conservatives pooh-pooh the danger that the occupation plays into the hands of terrorist propagandists yet blithely assume that Iraqi democracy would play into the hands of our own. To the chagrin of ide-

ologists everywhere, however, Muslims are creatures as complex and unpredictable as the rest of us. They cannot tenderly be led by the noses as asses are, no matter that the U.S. adds Iraq to the ranks of Muslim democracies.

In short, the steps in the causal logic whereby Iraqi democracy defeats anti-American terrorism are so numerous and doubtful that it becomes impossible to believe that Bush's supporters have ever actually thought them through. Those who wonder what error befell the conservative movement since Bush took office are asking the wrong question. Since 9/11, the conservative movement has not made unsound or fallacious arguments for supporting Bush's policies. Rather, it has made no arguments at all. T.S. Eliot once asked, "Are you alive or not? Is there nothing in your head?" The answer: "Nothing, again, nothing."

It follows that Mephistophelean neo-conservatives did not suddenly commandeer the conservative movement. Whatever may be said of neoconservatives, at least they know what they think. (*The Weekly Standard* for this reason has always been a good read.) Every nation has a faction zealous for national glory and horrified by decadence and dishonor; in the United States, a famously idealistic country, that faction emphasizes the blessings that American power confers upon all mankind. Today, we call them neoconservatives, but in some sense they have always existed.

After 9/11, neoconservatives championed any war that we waged in reaction. In this, they were acting opportunistically but not hypocritically: in their view, 9/11 is what happens when the United States suffers any challenges to its authority. The rest of the movement knew only that it wanted a ruthless response. Neoconservatism just happened to provide a convenient ideological infrastructure with which to justify metonymic revenge against some

Muslim Arab or other. Before 9/11, the movement was praising modesty in foreign affairs; after 9/11, it did not so much embrace neoconservatism as blunder into it by accident.

To be sure, conservatives have hotly denied the charge of neoconservatism but never by actually disagreeing with it. (*National Review Online*, which now far outshadows the magazine in influence, has become the world's most prolific organ of neoconservative opinion.) In an article in *The National Interest*, for example, *NR* editor Rich Lowry and an anonymous co-author contrasted neoconservatism to what they called the "Reagan synthesis." The Reagan synthesis, as they describe it, endorses the neoconservative project of expanding liberty abroad and exerting American power as a force for good but nonetheless recognizes that foreign policy "should be prudent, flexible, aware of power relationships and immune to juvenile excess." When exactly do prudence and awareness of power relationships conflict with the imperative to spread the blessings of American power abroad? The authors do not say. The grand Reagan synthesis turns out to be nothing more than "as much neoconservatism as the world lets us get away with." As the world has a strong tendency to frustrate neoconservative ambitions, no practical difference exists between actual neoconservatism and the authors' neoconservatism-in-everything-but-name.

As it happens, the broader conservative public supports Bush for very sensible, non-neoconservative reasons. Those reasons just happen to be poorly informed. For example, many believe—including an astonishing 90 percent of soldiers serving in Iraq—that the U.S. invaded to retaliate against Saddam Hussein for his role in the 9/11 attacks. Now that Saddam is gone but Iraqis are still giving us trouble, they reason, we must kill them before they kill us. If

Americans understood that soldiers were dying not to kill the bad guys but to prevent them from killing each other, Bush's popularity would evaporate.

The movement's leaders may be better informed, but they have no clearer idea of what they actually think. What they need is analysis: the skeptical tradition extending from Machiavelli to Hobbes, Hamilton, and Burnham that seeks to understand the world as it is rather than as we might like it to be. Analysis, however, requires intellect, but the movement's mainstream, perhaps to avoid embarrassment (some main-

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stream figures favorably compared Bush not just to Ronald Reagan but to Abraham Lincoln), has increasingly ostracized its brightest minds.

Sadly, analysis is also often lacking outside the mainstream movement. Every movement throws off disgruntled outsiders (conservatives sometimes call them "paleoconservatives") who feel bitterly their loss of power. They write obsessively, sometimes quite fancifully, on the alleged perfidies of the mainstream. Often, however, their critiques want credibility.

Some, for example, carry on the Cold War obsession with the so-called "crisis of the West." Convinced that history at some point took a wrong turn, they pore over ancient texts in search of some Hermetic insight into the fatal error. (Not surprisingly, this approach has little popular appeal, although it still commands respect among professional conservatives.) The notion of a crisis of the West, however, grossly overestimates the importance of ideas; indeed, it

requires an unphilosophical and almost paranoid ability to treat ideologies (most conspicuously, liberalism) as living, breathing omnipresences to which intentions, tactics, strategies, feelings, disappointments, and conflicts can all be attributed. Believers in the crisis of the West rest almost their entire worldview on an elusive notion—modernity—borrowed from a half-formed science—sociology. Crisis-of-the-West conservatism, at one time a fruitful response to the calamities of the 20th century, has become more a posture than a genuine school of thought.

Another group pleads for the conservative movement to return to its alleged first principles. "If only people would still read Russell Kirk," one hears. But the movement never had any first principles to begin with. Although it boasts a carefully husbanded canon of supposedly foundational texts, the men who wrote them—Kirk, Strauss, Voegelin, Weaver, Chambers, Meyer—were notorious eccentrics given to extravagant claims whose policy implications remain largely obscure. Russell Kirk, for example, even as he shrewdly positioned himself as the intellectual godfather of the conservative movement, had almost no political opinions whatsoever.

Still others eulogize local attachments and ancestral loyalties. They invoke a litany of examples: family, church, kin, community, school, the "little platoons" in which Burke found the basis of political association. Celebrating such "infra-political" institutions may well have made sense in the 1950s, the high tide of American nationalism and federal



government prestige. At most other times, however, ancestral attachments are dangerously subversive. The U.S. could not have survived had it not ruthlessly extirpated the ancestral loyalties of both natives and newcomers; Great Britain suffered endless civil wars before the great constitutional oak that Burke praised took root; the West itself succeeded precisely because it cut short the reach of the extended family or clan.

## IN THE RUN-UP TO THE INVASION, LEADING CONSERVATIVES ANNOUNCED THAT CONSERVATISM NOW MEANT **SPREADING GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION.**

Ancestral loyalties are the curse of uncivilized peoples, most especially in the hypermnestic Middle East. Most ominously, praise of local attachments now comes in the guise of multiculturalism, perhaps the most insidious threat to a just order today. Not for nothing did communism become a left-wingogue.

For all their philippics, disgruntled conservatives remain decidedly of the movement, if not in it, for they share with the mainstream the fundamental conceit that conservatism exists to advance some core set of beliefs or principles. Like a soul animating a body, these principles allegedly guide, smooth or grim, all the movement's institutions, programs, publications, alliances, tactical feints, and shifting positions. Hence, even those outside the mainstream keep the faith that the movement will not stray forever. Conservatism, in this view, can no more betray its principles than the God of Abraham can betray His covenant with Israel.

But "conservatism" has no mystical essence. Rather than a magisterium handed down from apostolic times, it is an ideology whose contours are largely arbitrary and accidental. By ideology, I mean precisely what Orwell depicted in *1984*. I do not mean, of course, that con-

servatism is totalitarian. Taken as prophecy, *1984* has little merit. Taken as a description of the world we actually live in, however, it is indispensable. *1984* reveals not the horrors of the future but the quotidian realities of ideology in mass democracy. Conservatism exemplifies them all.

First, like Ingsoc, conservatism has a hierarchical structure. Like Orwell's "Inner Party," those at the top of the

movement have almost perfect freedom to decide what opinions count as official conservatism. The Iraq War furnishes a telling example. In the run-up to the invasion, leading conservatives announced that conservatism now meant spreading global democratic revolution. This forthright radicalism—this embrace of the sanative powers of violence—became quickly accepted as the ineluctable meaning of conservatism in foreign policy. Those who dissented risked ostracism and harsh rebuke. Had conservative leaders instead argued that global democratic revolution would not cure our woes but increase them, the rest of the movement would have accepted this position no less quickly. Millions of conservative epigones believe nothing less than what the movement's established organs tell them to believe. Rarely does a man recognize, like Winston Smith, his own ideology as such.

Second, conservatism is concerned less with truth than with distinguishing insiders from outsiders. Conservatives identify themselves in part by repeating slogans ("we are at war!") that, like "ignorance is strength," are less important for what (if anything) they say than for what saying them says about the

speaker. At the same time, to rise in the movement, one must develop a habitual obliviousness to truth, or what Orwell labeled "doublethinking." Anyone who expresses too vociferously too many of the following opinions, for example, cannot expect to make a career in the movement: that the Soviet Union was not the threat that anti-communists made it out to be, that the current tax system discriminates in favor of the very wealthy, that the Bush administration was wrong about the Iraq invasion in nearly every respect, that the constitutional design itself prevents judges from deciding cases according to the original meaning of the Constitution, that global warming poses small but unacceptable risks, that everyone in the abortion debate—even the most ardent pro-lifers—inevitably engages in arbitrary line-drawing. Whether these opinions and others are correct or not matters little to the movement conservative, even if he knows next to nothing about the topic at hand. If you do not reject these opinions or at least keep quiet, you are not a movement conservative and will be treated accordingly.

Third, and closely related to doublethinking, the conservative movement engages in selective editing of history. When events have a tendency to disconfirm ideology, down the memory hole they go. Thus, conservatives do not recall their dire warnings about the Soviet Union during the Cold War or about the economy after the Bush I or Clinton tax increases. On the Iraq invasion, they will not remind you of their claims that Iraqis would welcome us as liberators, that the world would soon be applauding the Iraq invasion, or that events in Lebanon and the Ukraine heralded global democratic revolution. Nor will conservatives remind you of their predictions that the insurgency's demise was imminent, that Saddam Hussein and then Zarqawi were the Big Men of the insurgency, or that the

insurgency consisted largely of foreign jihadis. As in 1984, the ability to forget that any of these events ever occurred signals one's loyalty to the movement. (Hence, the rise of hawkishness against Iran, not four years after the last effort to sell a war to an otherwise balky public.) To prove his loyalty to the emperor, everyone must compliment him on his new clothes. The most loyal believe that the emperor is wearing clothes to begin with.

Fourth, conservatism is entertaining. Understanding the world, though rewarding, provides nothing like the pleasures of a "Two Minute Hate," a focused, ritualized denunciation of enemies. To induce its own Two Minute Hates, conservatism, like Ingsoc in 1984, manufactures bogeymen such as "judicial activists," "so-called realists," or "moral relativists" that become symbolic representations of detested outsiders. Meanwhile, like the Inner Party in 1984, conservative leaders tolerate the more vulgar, angry purveyors of ideology—think talk-show hosts or authors of bestselling political books. The most vicious attacks, meanwhile, are reserved for turncoats, like Goldstein in 1984. (Of course, as many paleoconservatives could attest, the hatred is usually mutual.) Rooting for conservative ideology is as engrossing to its partisans as rooting for the local football team is to its fans.

None of this is to suggest that conservatism is uniquely pernicious. The roots of ideology lie deep in our cognitive limitations and instinct for group loyalty. One could make similar observations of any ideology. The most distinguishing feature of conservatism is its misleading name. Lexically, "conservatism" denotes caution, prudence, and resistance to change. Conservatism the ideology, however, has if anything tended towards recklessness. "Nuke 'em!" has always been a popular conservative sentiment, never more so than today with respect to the Muslim world. *For frantic boast*

*and foolish word / Thy mercy on thy people Lord!*

Whatever its past accomplishments, the conservative movement no longer kindles any "ironic points of light." It has produced fewer outstanding books even as it has taken over more of the intellectual and political landscape. This trend will only continue. Worse, no reckoning will be made: they hope in vain who expect conservatives to take responsi-

bility for the actual consequences of their actions. Conservatives have no use for the ethic of responsibility; they seek only to "see to it that the flame of pure intention is not quenched." The movement remains a fine place to make a career, but for wisdom one must look elsewhere. ■

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# Ideology Has Consequences

Bush rejects the politics of prudence.

By Jeffrey Hart

MANY REPUBLICANS must feel like that legendary man at the bar on the *Titanic*. Watching the iceberg slide by outside a porthole, he remarked, "I asked for ice. But this is too much." Republicans voted for a Republican and got George W. Bush, but his Republican Party is unrecognizable as the party we have known.

Recall the Eisenhower Republican Party. Eisenhower, a thoroughgoing realist, was one of the most successful presidents of the 20th century. So was the prudential Reagan, wary of using military force. Nixon would have been a good secretary of state, but emotionally wounded and suspicious, he was not suited to the presidency. Yet he, too, with Henry Kissinger, was a realist. George W. Bush represents a huge swing away from such traditional conservative Republicanism.

But the conservative movement in America has followed him, evacuating prudence and realism for ideology and folly. Left behind has been the experienced realism of James Burnham. Also vacated, the Burkean realism of Willmoore Kendall, who aspired, as he told Leo Strauss, to be the "American Burke." That Burkeanism entailed a sense of the complexity of society and the resistance of cultures to change. Gone, too, has been the individualism of Frank Meyer and the commonsense Western libertarianism of Barry Goldwater.

The post-2000 conservative movement has abandoned all that to back Bush and has followed him over the cliff into our calamity in Iraq. On top of all that, the Bush presidency has been fueled by the moral authoritarianism of the current third evangelical awakening.

Yes, aware Republicans are like that man on the *Titanic* who asked for ice, and this iceberg is too much.

The problem is that Bush campaigned in 2000 as a “compassionate conservative.” Today, the media calls him a conservative, yet there is nothing at all conservative about his policies, whether foreign or domestic. William F. Buckley once said that conservatism is the “politics of reality.” But Bush has not pursued reality-based policies. Will we have to find another word? It certainly looks that way.

Buckley has said that Bush has been “engulfed” by Iraq and that if he had been a European prime minister he would have resigned by now. Other commentators known as conservatives have agreed: Andrew Sullivan, George Will, Francis Fukuyama. It is worth considering a statement by Richard Cheney:

Once you get to Baghdad, it's not clear what you do with it. It's not clear what kind of government you put in place of the one that's currently there now. Is it going to be a Shia regime, a Sunni regime, a Kurdish regime? Or one that tilts toward the Baathists, or one that tilts toward Islamic fundamentalists? How much credibility is that going to have if it's set up by the American military there? How long does the United States military have to stay there to protect the people that sign on for that government, and what happens once we leave?

Smart man, that Cheney. The only problem is that he said that back in 1991 during the first Gulf War when he was secretary of defense in the administration of George H.W. Bush. At that time, Brent Scowcroft was national security adviser and James Baker was secretary of state. Recently, Scowcroft has said that though he has been

friends with Cheney for more than 30 years, he no longer really knows him. What has happened to Cheney is anybody's guess.

It can't be 9/11. We know from many sources that Bush had decided to invade Iraq long before 9/11. In *The Right Man*, David Frum recounts being interviewed for a position by Michael Gerson, head Bush speechwriter and also policy adviser, not long after Bush became president. Gerson told Frum that Bush would topple Saddam. At that time nothing was being said about weapons of mass destruction.

*National Review* editor Rich Lowry sheds some light on the president's motivation for invading Iraq in a column titled “The Revenge of Orthodoxy.” Following historian Walter Russell Mead, he notices that we are in the “Third Awakening” of Protestant evangelicalism and that the Bush presidency should be stamped “Brought to you by orthodox Christian believers.” He makes clear the implications of this for American foreign policy:

The reinvigorated Wilsonian foreign policy championed by Bush—and motivated less by Woodrow Wilson's secular values (international law, etc.) and more by religious beliefs (the God-given rights of all people)—is a reflection of Bush's Christian base.

Lowry, following Mead, is surely correct here. But just what is conservative about it? Historically, American evangelicalism has veered wildly from the crusading lyrics of Julia Ward Howe's “Battle Hymn of the Republic” to the pacifism of William Jennings Bryan.

And has anyone ever claimed that Wilsonianism is conservative? To give Woodrow a bit of a break, his “Wilsonianism” was much more temperate than is sometimes thought: “It will now be our fortunate duty,” he said, “to assist

by example, by sober, friendly counsel, and by material aid in the establishment of democracy through out the world.” That statement by Wilson reflects the original meaning of the torch the Statue of Liberty holds aloft: the United States is a beacon of liberty. Emma Lazarus's famous lines about welcoming immigrants amounted to a misinterpretation. True enough, Lloyd George, when he returned to England from Versailles, remarked that he had not done badly considering that he had been sitting between Napoleon (Clemenceau) and Jesus Christ (Wilson). But just what did Wilson mean by “the world” when he spoke of “establishing democracy”? I hazard the thought that he focused on the West and was not thinking of Borneo or the Congo, nor, surely, of launching invasions and occupations of Mesopotamia. With Bush in mind, Woodrow's “Wilsonianism,” though naïve and though certainly not conservative, can be declared Not Guilty.

To define what “conservative” in fact means, the place to turn is Edmund Burke, the founder of modern political philosophy, the first political thinker to base his thought on empirical fact and on history. Both Hobbes and Locke were empiricists, but in their political thought they reasoned from assumptions they posited about human nature.

Hobbes took a relatively dark view of human nature, seeing human life in a mythical pre-social state of nature as “solitary, nasty, brutish and short.” Such creatures needed firm control. Locke, in contrast, was more optimistic, seeing man in a state of nature as governed by reason and thus requiring a much less intrusive government. The empiricism reflected by Locke, however, represented a new way of seeing the world and made political philosophy, beginning with Burke, possible. The opening pages of Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690) possess the promise of



a new and innocent dawn as Locke brushes aside much of Western philosophy, judging metaphysics to be a distraction from his focus on the facts of this world, with a view to improving it. As a result, we have the facticity reflected in the birth of the novel (Defoe), history (Gibbon, Hume), biography (Boswell), and Burke. In *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) we have the thrill of Locke's empiricism as it appears in the prose of our first novel, that is, in the first distinctively modern form of literature:

The sixth day of our being at sea we came into Yarmouth Roads; the wind having been contrary, and the Weather calm, we had made but little Way since the Storm. Here we were obliged to come to an Anchor, and here we lay, the Wind continuing contrary—viz. at South-west—for seven or eight Days, during which time a great many Ships from Newcastle came into the same Roads, as the common Harbour where the ships might wait for a wind from the river.

Never before in literature had man been placed so thoroughly in a physical (empirical) environment. Never before had biography come to us with the detail Boswell uses in his *Life of Samuel Johnson*.

Burke does not begin with hypothetical “states of nature” but with the facts of history and human behavior. His great breakthrough into new territory—he wrote that he had been “alarmed into reflection” by the completely unique events in France—came in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). To see his thought develop here in an exploratory way, then see him make further discoveries a year later, is to experience enormous intellectual excitement.

Once, while I was a graduate student at Columbia, I took a seminar in impor-

tant thinkers with Jacques Barzun and Lionel Trilling. Barzun, in particular, liked to start by identifying the core of a great thinker's thought. When it came to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution*, I offered: “Burke knows that if you tried to tie your shoes in the morning by means of reason you would never get out of the house.” That is, you tie your shoes by habit. Barzun nodded approval but gave this a social dimension, saying, “Burke wanted his morning newspaper delivered on time.” That is, the writing, manufacture, and delivery of that newspaper require a great many actions that are accomplished by habit. Social institutions are the habits of society.

What Burke faced in the radical *philosophes* across the Channel was something new: an actual society in France being attacked by abstract “rights of man.” To this he opposed the historic liberties of England. He saw the abstraction-based attack on an actual society as something new in history—and inherently dangerous. Part of the excitement of the *Reflections* consists in Burke confronting this novelty, searching for a vocabulary to describe it: “abstract theory,” “metaphysical dogma.” Burke was seeking terms to describe a belief system impervious to fact or experience, and he brought to bear a permanently valid analysis of human behavior and the role of social institutions. Burke's “abstract theory” and “metaphysical dogma” we would call ideology.

Burke's thought, however, did not conclude with the *Reflections*. And it is exciting to watch him responding to events as they unfold. By 1791, in his “Thoughts on French Affairs,” he recognized that the social forces converging against the absolute monarchy had made revolution inevitable. Saying that the French Revolution had occupied him for two years, he now recognized that:

If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it; the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope will forward it; and they, who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs, will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself, than the mere designs of men. They will not be resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate.

Burke there moved from social structure in the *Reflections* to social process. In his great essay “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1865) Matthew Arnold rightly described this as one of the great moments in modern thought.

In the free nations of the world at the present time, we have experienced changes that can be called revolutions, certainly the biomedical, also the women's revolution, which has been one of the most far reaching in its implications. Not until 1912 was women's suffrage on the agenda of a major American political party, Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive (“Bull Moose”) Party. And women's suffrage implied women's equality. The sources of women's demand for equality surely went back before 1912. The result today can be seen in almost any college or university graduate school, indeed in the armed forces. I know the subject is fraught with emotion and contention, but I consider analytically that the demand for the availability of abortion is a derivative of women's equality: that is, equality requires that women be able to shape their lives as freely as men do. Many will find that analytical conclusion disagreeable. No doubt Burke hated to see that the French Revolution had been inevitable. Yet he knew that those who “persist in opposing [the implications of] this mighty

current in human affairs ... will not be resolute and firm but perverse and obstinate."

While it is not incorrect to call Burke a conservative, it is also correct to call him an analytical realist. And I suggest that they may be the same thing. Indeed there is a sense in which any successful government must be based upon such analytical realism. Today, many historians judge that Franklin Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower were among the best presidents in the 20th century and rank them among the best in American history. I think Ronald Reagan will join them. All were realistic in handling the challenges they faced.

Bush has offered two justifications for his invasion of Iraq. First, that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. None were discovered, and Bush's claims, upon examination, have been found suspect. He has also projected a democratic Iraq, some of his statements being so disconnected from actuality as to qualify as pure ideology.

For example, at the American Enterprise Institute on Feb. 26, 2003, Bush put forth the following theory of human behavior:

Human cultures can be vastly different. Yet the human heart desires the same good things, everywhere on earth. In our desire to be safe from brutal and bullying oppression, human beings are the same. For these fundamental reasons, freedom and democracy will always and everywhere have greater appeal than the slogans of hatred and the tactics of terror.

Yes, human beings do dislike "brutal and bullying oppression," but everything else there is false. The people going to work at the World Trade Center on 9/11 did not want the same things as Mohammed Atta. Historically, holiness,

power, glory, conquest, and empire have had greater appeal than freedom and democracy. But Bush's belief in the convergence and even identity of goals apparently is unshakable.

Speaking in Whitehall later in 2003, Bush was at it again, claiming, "The establishment of a free Iraq in the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global expansion of democracy ... as the alternative to instability and hatred and terror." Sure, "global expansion of democracy." Andrew Bacevich of Boston University, a strategic thinker, wrote of Bush's

fusion of breathtaking utopianism with barely disguised machtpolitik. It reads as if it were the product not of sober, ostensibly conservative Republicans but of an unlikely collaboration of Woodrow Wilson and the elder Field Marshal von Moltke.

On April 24, Bush repeated his fantastic theory in a speech in Irvine, California:

I based a lot of my foreign policy decisions on some things I think are true. One, I believe that there's an Almighty, and secondly, I believe one of the great gifts of the Almighty is the desire in everybody's soul, regardless of what you look like or where you live, to be free. I believe liberty is universal. I believe people want to be free. And I know that democracies do not war with each other. And I know that the best way to defeat the enemy, the best way to defeat their ability to exploit hopelessness and despair is to give people a chance to live in a free society.

Well, it is certainly taking a long time for what the Almighty wants to make its appearance in the actual world. Most of

the world today is far from democratic. Over the long span of human history, democracy is almost invisible. In the real world, many people want a society in which the rules laid down in the Koran govern all activities and take absolute precedence over liberty. In Iraq, the radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr has no interest in freedom, and al-Sadr is the power behind the present Prime Minister Maliki. What planet is Bush living on? He makes the "metaphysical dogma" of the radical *philosophes* seem sober by comparison.

Before long, students may be allowed to take entire history courses in the expanding library of books analyzing Bush's Iraq calamity and other failures of his administration, which also derive from his tendency to privilege ideology over realism. Supply-side ideology led to large tax cuts and mountainous deficits. Privatization ideology led to an incomprehensible and unnecessarily expensive prescription-drug plan. No previous administration has produced such an outpouring.

Is Bush a conservative? Of course not. When all the evidence is in, I think historians will agree with Princeton's Sean Wilentz, who wrote a carefully argued article judging Bush to have been the worst president in American history. The problem is that he is generally called a conservative, perhaps because he obviously is not a liberal. It may be that Bush, in the magnitude of his failure, defies conventional categories. But the word "conservative" deserves to be rescued. Against the misconception that Bush is a conservative, and appealing to Burke, all of our analytical energies must be brought to bear. I hope I have made a beginning here. ■

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# The Gospel According to Bush

If God promises universal freedom, why does He need our help to liberate the world?

By Daniel Larison

IN TRADITIONAL CHRISTIANITY, the motif of liberation and deliverance is a strong one—so strong that the story of Israel's freedom from bondage in Egypt and the spiritual liberation of humanity from sin through Christ's death and resurrection can easily become confused with ideas of earthly, political liberty from which they are clearly and sharply distinct. We have seen this sort of conflation of spiritual and earthly emancipation in the liberation theology of Latin American Catholics, who give their preaching of the Gospel a steady dose of Marxism and vague endorsements of revolutionary violence, but lately here in America we have started to see a similar blurring of the lines between Christian spiritual liberty and political liberty, the latter of which assuredly has its historical roots in the lands and traditions of Christian civilization. The latest proponent of the idea of a divinely bestowed "universal freedom" has been none other than President George W. Bush.

On Sept. 12, President Bush spoke with an assembled group of conservative journalists, who relayed his comments. Rich Lowry, editor of *National Review*, quoted the president's explanation for his confidence in the "rightness of his strategy" and the eventual success of the administration's "freedom agenda" in the Middle East:

Freedom is universal. ... And I recognize there's a debate around the world about the kind of—whether that principle is real. I call it moral relativism, if people do not believe that certain people can be free. I

mean, I just cannot subscribe to that. People—I know it upsets people when I ascribe that to my belief in an Almighty, and that I believe a gift from that Almighty is universal freedom. That's what I believe.

This was hardly the first time Bush had asserted, as he had at the Republican National Convention in 2004, that freedom was "God's gift to every man and woman in this world." This had played an important epideictic role in earlier speeches that raised the president's rhetoric to the level of the revelatory and prophetic, freeing it from the burdens of proof and deliberation. This claim had also served a useful political function in rallying both Christians and secular conservatives to support global liberal revolution and tapped into an American tradition dating back to Lincoln of closely mixing biblically derived rhetoric with specific political goals. As the respected literary scholar and great conservative thinker M.E. Bradford wrote of this mixture in Lincoln's rhetoric in the context of the American political tradition:

We [Americans] were a fellowship of 'the Book' and took all government and political philosophy—even the Constitution—to be practical and unworthy of mention in the same breath with Holy Scripture. Politics might, within reason, be tested against revealed truth. But we never imagined more than a tangency for the political and the sacred—never a holy beginning or conclusion *by* politics.

For the same reason, there is something deeply disturbing about the conflation of God's gifts and political liberty, and especially with the political liberation of other nations. (Disregard for the moment whether such liberation of other peoples is entirely genuine or in the best interests of the United States.) First, it can dangerously blur the lines between the sacred and the profane, investing the "freedom agenda" with a divine mandate and the presumption to represent God's will in a shockingly impious manner. Even more importantly, in President Bush's claim that God bestows universal freedom on all of humanity there is the danger of encouraging despair and loss of faith in a God who supposedly gives universal freedom but nonetheless withholds it from billions of our fellow human beings and who denied it to most of humanity for thousands of years. Bush's assertion ends up sounding rather like a theistic version of Rousseau's "man is born free, yet everywhere he is in chains," which is a suggestion either of divine impotence or an invitation to revolutionary warfare to realize God's supposed purpose of bestowing universal, political freedom on the world.

Friedrich Hayek, who, it may fairly be said, gave more thought to the question of the origins of liberty than George W. Bush has, once wrote:

Freedom is an artefact of civilization that released man from the trammels of the small group, the momentary moods of which even the leader had to obey. Freedom



was made possible by the gradual evolution of the discipline of civilization which is at the same time the discipline of freedom.

Political freedom is a product of culture and habit, the fruit of the discipline of civilization. As beings created in the image and likeness of God, it might be said that all men have the potential to acquire these habits and learn this discipline over a great length of time, but to believe that this discipline is more or less automatically inherent in all people right now is to dismiss both the effects of the fall and the contingencies of history. Christians know that men are created free in the sense that we have free will, but they also know that to fully realize and perfect that freedom, they are called to obedience to God's will. In any case, we should not mistake man's free will or the spiritual liberty Christians believe they have received in Christ as sacred justifications for any particular political arrangement or any particular set of guaranteed liberties from governmental interference.

When the Apostle Paul wrote that "there is neither slave nor free" in Christ (Gal. 3:28), it was a statement of the unity in Christ that transcends all categories of earthly identity—it was decidedly not a statement that Christ necessarily wills the earthly personal and political freedom of all. That kind of earthly freedom may indeed be desirable, just, and worthwhile, but we make a crucial mistake if we declare it simply to be God's gift. On the one hand, it would make a particular kind of earthly freedom a divinely ordained religious command about which there could be no debate or deliberation, investing in its partisans the self-righteousness of the chosen few. On the other hand, it induces a complacency about the need for the preservation and protection of liberty, taking it as something that is

simply given and guaranteed by God, which requires little or none of the diligence that the Founders believed to be necessary to protect inherited rights against the usurpation of government. Bush's idea makes the truly significant and meaningful redemption that God has given us through His Son only one part of the deliverance. If we believe President Bush, God also has a sort of program of earthly liberation. It is an attempt to immanentize the spiritual liberty of Christians as political liberty, while at the same time stripping this liberty of any association with revelation. It is what political philosopher and philosopher of history Eric Voegelin would have called a modern gnostic error. This idea is injurious to the deliberative nature of republican government and has inspired the justification of revolutionary violence in a questionable cause in Iraq.

God has created man with the capacity and ability to develop the discipline Hayek spoke of, but it is precisely in respecting man's freedom—man's free will, that is—that God has left us to struggle to acquire that discipline in the political and other earthly spheres. God does not give us universal freedom, just as He does not establish universal earthly justice: these are tasks left to us to realize in confirmation of our existence as free beings. Freedom is a discipline to be learned and a state to be earned, just as with anything else in life. When men have established a free order, it seems reasonable that it is with the blessing and guidance of a merciful God, but specifically political freedom is not something God automatically grants to all people.

President Bush evidently doesn't understand the objections of his critics if he thinks any of us are saying that there are people who are inherently incapable of living in political liberty. Without our cultural and political inheritance, our traditions, the institutions established by our ancestors, and the

cultivation of the habits and mentality necessary to make liberal self-government (or something approximating it) function, Anglo-Americans would be equally at a loss and would flail around just as blindly as anyone else. To the extent that we misunderstand or have forgotten our own history, we have already lost large parts of our constitutional tradition. But in our tradition, it took the better part of four centuries for a parliamentary institution to mature and stake a claim to sovereignty; it took another half a century for those claims to be resolved in Parliament's favor; it took another century to cultivate the colonial spirit of self-government. Christians may reasonably see in many of these developments the fortuitous cooperation between divine grace and human ingenuity, but nothing would be more mistaken than to confuse this highly contingent, historical evolution of political structures in one relatively small corner of the world with the fullness of God's plan or to claim divine approval for a political agenda that has no clear basis in Scripture or tradition.

If Bush speaks of God giving men universal freedom, he might as well say that God has given man universal bread or universal world peace, while tacitly ignoring hunger and war. God is Spirit. He grants to men spiritual liberty from sin and death—far greater liberation, surely, than the tawdry Rights of Man. It is not faithful to the Christian tradition, and possibly rather unhinged, to say that God gives man universal freedom. God is the Lord of the free and the unfree, and it is surely important for the hope of those Christians who do not enjoy the blessings of liberty to know that they are no less His children in spite of not experiencing political freedom. ■

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# Conserving Leviathan

Big government works no better when Republicans run it.

By W. James Antle III

SOMEWHERE BARRY GOLDWATER is smiling. After nearly six years of misadventures from Baghdad to New Orleans, overly munificent government spending is the issue that finally has many Republicans exercised enough to disown George W. Bush. The backlash is most evident among conservative writers, who are cranking out books cataloging the president's fiscal heresies and reading him out of the movement.

Bruce Bartlett hit the *New York Times* bestseller list this spring by accusing Bush of being a "phony conservative" who bankrupted America and betrayed Ronald Reagan. *New York Post* columnist Ryan Sager worried that Bush-era fiscal policies portended a lasting split between the libertarians and social conservatives who formed the postwar American Right. Andrew Sullivan contended that Bush's religious conservatism endorses a messianic view of government incompatible with the Right's anti-statist tradition.

The verdict isn't quite unanimous, however. Some conservatives continue to insist that Bush's spending choices—or the lack thereof—make sense after 9/11. Others, while acknowledging the administration's fiscal-policy flaws, offer a more qualified defense based on existing political circumstances.

*National Review's* Ramesh Ponnuru chided conservatives who maintain that "the problem would go away if Bush would simply commit himself to shrinking the government," a "simplistic analysis" that ignores "the smallness and weakness of the constituency for limited government." Writing in *The Weekly*

*Standard*, Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam dismissed "the appealing fantasy" in which "ideological purity leads to political success." John McIntyre lamented in *Real Clear Politics* that "there is a lot of hyperventilating about the Bush administration's spending and 'out of control' deficits, much of it by folks who praise Reagan yet trash Bush."

The problem these commentators point to is real. Voters like balanced budgets in the abstract but refuse to give up any of their own federal benefits to secure them. Every program and agency has a built-in constituency benefiting from its existence. There is no comparable public outcry for shutting them down.

Consider recent political history. Republicans lost congressional seats in 1982 after enacting the Reagan budget cuts of 1981. They lost control of the Senate in 1986 after trying to freeze Social Security cost-of-living adjustments. The GOP came roaring back in 1994 on a platform of fiscal tightfistedness. After a few token attempts to implement that platform, including a failed bid to restrain Medicare spending, they lost seats again in 1996.

Fiscal conservatives might explain 1996 away by noting that many Democrats rode Bill Clinton's coattails into office—except that Clinton himself based much of his re-election campaign on fears that Republicans would cut funding for Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment. GOP leaders came back to Washington eager to forge a balanced-budget agreement with Clinton—and proceeded to cave on spending thereafter.

Yet even if ideals aren't sufficient to limit government, a party's stated ideology matters. Republican big spenders are nothing new, but not until the current administration did conservatives dress up GOP profligacy in the language of principle. Past Republican budgetary excesses were viewed as setbacks at best and capitulations at worst. Under Bush, they have often been sold as part of a paradoxical strategy to grow government now in order to shrink it later.

Fred Barnes was perhaps the first to rechristen the epithet "big government conservatism" as a positive political agenda. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, he described Bush's approach to the budget as a trade-off. "To gain free-market reforms and expand individual choice," Barnes wrote, "he's willing to broaden programs and increase spending."

If federal programs could somehow promote individual responsibility and private ownership, big-government conservatives claimed, spending would ultimately go down as people needed the dole less. As Douthat and Salam recently explained, "Rather than target the 'supply-side' of government, or the amount of government spending, Bush's focus was on the 'demand-side', or the need for government services." For Republican politicians, always interested in conservatism without consequences, it was the best of both worlds: the promise of smaller government without big spending cuts.

Instead, GOP-controlled Washington has been very generous with taxpayer dollars. The American Enterprise Institute's Veronique de Rugy has calculated

that Bush's first term saw the biggest increase in real discretionary spending since Lyndon Johnson was president. Adjusting for 9/11 and the Iraq War doesn't make the picture look much better. According to Heritage Foundation budget expert Brian Riedl, domestic discretionary spending, excluding homeland-security expenditures, has increased by nearly 40 percent since 2001—more than it increased during Clinton's entire eight years in office.

The problem with blaming the electorate is that the Republican constituency has changed less than the party's strategy for appealing to them has. In less than a decade, the GOP has gone from arguing that the welfare state undermines the institution of marriage to using it to promote marriage. Instead of promising religious conservatives that the federal government will not interfere with home-schooling or private Christian schools, Republicans emphasize values-friendly public education programs.

Ponnuru accounted for the GOP's shift by noting that "public antipathy to the federal government built ... because federal activism was seen as undermining middle-class values and interests." But that perception existed in part because conservatives spent a generation making that case. It makes a difference whether Republicans portray Washington as an aggressor against traditional values or an upholder of those values—as long as they are in charge, that is. The GOP is transforming its constituency into another big-government voting bloc. Yet big-government conservatism is failing on its own terms.

Social Security reform died, but the biggest new entitlement in 40 years—a prescription-drug benefit that added \$18 trillion to Medicare's liabilities—passed easily. The provisions of No Child Left Behind that were supposed to promote school choice and greater flexibility for states didn't make it through Congress,

but the record education spending increases remain.

How about the promise of reduced dependency on federal aid? In March, *USA Today* reported that enrollment in 25 major federal programs—from Medicaid to Pell Grants—increased by 17 percent since 2000. The population grew by 5 percent over the same period. While partly attributable to a slight uptick in the poverty rate, the logic of big-government conservatism also played a role.

To help encourage work over welfare, Congress has occasionally expanded eligibility for other public aid programs. Allowing low-income workers to own cars worth more than \$4,650 to qualify for food stamps extended the benefit to an estimated 2.7 million people.

When confronted with this dismal record, defenders of the new conservative view of government usually respond in one of two ways. The first is to say that the concept was not executed properly. As Douthat and Salam wrote "His administration has gone astray not because it has spent too much money, but because it has spent money badly."

The Medicare prescription-drug benefit is an example. It was supposed to contain more incentives for seniors to move to private health-insurance programs, thereby cutting costs. Congress stripped these provisions and Bush signed the bill anyway. Moderate Republicans and liberal Democrats deleted school vouchers from No Child Left Behind, yet that was no obstacle to a presidential signing ceremony.

The legislative process normally bids up the price tag of new programs and expands their scope, however. A reputedly conservative agenda that relies on higher outlays and broad support from congressional Democrats will always be modified in a more statist fashion.

The second response is to point out that Reagan was a big spender too. Federal spending, the argument goes,

consumes a smaller slice of the economy today than it did in the good old days of the 1980s. McIntyre observed in *Real Clear Politics* that "the most recent 'out of control' Bush deficit at 2.6 percent of GDP is far below the eight-year Reagan average of 4.2 percent."

Missing from this analysis is context. Reagan took office during an era of dizzying government growth as the most fiscally conservative president in decades. When he left office, federal spending had declined relative to GDP and real non-entitlement domestic spending was \$27 billion less than he found it. Bush has watched spending rise both in real-dollar terms and as a percentage of GDP.

Worse, Reagan's failure of nerve on spending nearly undid many of his other economic achievements. The record deficits of the 1980s paved the way for increases in marginal tax rates in the 1990s. Rising Social Security payroll taxes, enacted after Republicans refused to touch the retirement program's costs, imposed new burdens on middle-class families, making them less sympathetic to Reaganomics. And galloping Medicare growth helped fuel the medical-cost inflation that makes national health insurance such a temptation even today.

This history is already repeating itself. By failing to set any priorities on spending, the GOP is making its platform of lower taxes and personal-account-based entitlement reform untenable. Democrats are already calling for a repeal of the Bush tax cuts to pay for the growth of the welfare state. In *The Weekly Standard* Irwin Stelzer advocates higher taxes on behalf of the warfare state. Budget cuts may not be popular, but combining big government with a free-market agenda appears to be impossible.

The more Republicans struggle with this dilemma, the more expensive government gets. On second thought, Barry Goldwater probably wouldn't be so happy after all. ■



# The Realist Kennan

The architect of containment understood the limits of power—and of democracy.

By Lee Congdon

WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION of his role in the promotion of covert intelligence operations, a role he came to regret, no aspect of the late George Kennan's remarkable career has stirred more controversy than his authorship of the policy of containing Russia's expansive tendencies. Did that policy not, as one critic put it, contribute "to the impulse to overstate the hostility of the Soviets to the United States, their military capability in respect to America, and their interest in an armed contest?" Those who read, in Kennan's famous "X" article of 1947, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," that Soviet pressure could be "contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points" might be forgiven for thinking such criticism valid.

In fact, Kennan did forgive them, holding himself responsible for failing to clarify his intended meaning. Containment, he used every opportunity to insist, was to have been understood in a political rather than a military sense. We know that he was telling the truth and not simply hoping to escape blame for the militarization of Cold War thinking because he had made it clear—even before the Soviet Union detonated a nuclear "device"—that he did not believe war to be either necessary or inevitable.

Although by no means a pacifist, Kennan recognized that a U.S.-USSR war would have been one of annihilation. Such a conflict was terrible enough before the dawn of the nuclear age. In 1949, while serving as director of the

State Department's Policy Planning Staff, he made a fact-finding trip to Germany. What he witnessed in Hamburg, where in the past he had been posted as a Foreign Service officer, sickened him. From July 24 to Aug. 3, 1943, the Allies had subjected the city to a series of devastating air raids—code-named Operation Gomorrah. On one night—July 27–28—739 Allied planes unloaded 9,000 tons of high explosives and incendiary bombs that created an unimaginable firestorm; 35,000 men, women, and children perished.

Six years later, the extent of the destruction was still evident. "For the first time," Kennan wrote in his diaries, "I felt an unshakable conviction that no momentary military advantage ... could have justified this stupendous, careless destruction of civilian life and of material values, built up laboriously by human hands over the course of centuries for purposes having nothing to do with this war." The atom bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had already convinced him that a nuclear exchange would result in millions of casualties and an environmental catastrophe from which the planet would never recover. In 1961, therefore, when Walt Rostow assumed the directorship of the Policy Planning Staff and announced it as his view that a nuclear war could be won, Kennan exploded in anger. He would rather see his children dead, he told Rostow, than have them experience such a war.

Kennan's attitude toward what he called the "nuclear delusion" was dic-

tated not only by his recognition of the suicidal nature of nuclear weapons but by his deepening conviction that humanity's survival should not be placed at risk for a West that was exhibiting clear signs of internal dissolution. "I can see very little merit," he told interviewer George Urban in 1976, "in organizing ourselves to defend from the Russians the porno shops in central Washington." But even if the decline of the West could be reversed—and Kennan was not optimistic—no rational political purpose could be served by the universal ruin that nuclear weapons would bring about.

Kennan agreed with Clausewitz, who famously asserted, "war is nothing but the continuation of politics with the admixture of other means." He believed that war, to be justified, had to serve realistic political goals. "The political object is the goal," the German had written, "war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purposes." When, for example, news reached him that North Korea had invaded the south, Kennan knew that the incursion would have to be met with resistance, but he argued that military action should have the limited aim of advancing only to the former demarcation line along the 38th parallel. To continue beyond that point, even if militarily feasible, would be to risk a wider conflict that might involve the Russians or the Chinese.

Years later, while conducting research for a study of the diplomatic background to the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894, a

pivotal event in the lead up to the Great War, Kennan made a startling discovery. The alliance, in its final form, was “a purely military document. Nothing was said in it about the political objectives for which one might be fighting.” To formulate such objectives would have been to set limits, but the Great War, in Kennan’s view the event that marked the beginning of the West’s decline, was limitless in its aims. “Victory,” he wrote, “was to be either total or overwhelmingly decisive; and it was, in this sense, regarded as an objective in itself.” Total victory demanded unconditional surrender, which ensured the prolongation of hostilities and eventual casting off of all moral restraint. It inflamed hatreds and made a compromise peace impossible.

Kennan was sharply critical of Franklin Roosevelt for insisting upon unconditional surrender during World War II. That principle may have relieved the president of the difficult task of coming to some understanding with the Soviet Union with regard to the shape of postwar Europe, but it made it all but impossible to form a clear picture of what Stalin had in mind for Eastern Europe. Kennan did not, to be sure, maintain that negotiation with Hitler would have proved fruitful or even possible, but he did believe that talks with leaders of the German resistance—one of whom, Count Helmuth von Moltke, had been a revered friend—could have been pursued.

The admiration he felt for the martyred von Moltke, together with his long years of diplomatic service in Germany, had made of Kennan a Germanophile. It is not surprising, then, that he respected the approach to war taken by the great practitioner of realpolitik Otto von Bismarck. In a time of exclusive nationalism, that “towering figure” remained an old-fashioned Prussian patriot. True, he provoked, fought, and won three wars between 1864 and 1871, but he always

projected concrete and realistic political objectives. Having secured them, he made an end to hostilities; never did he attempt to destroy his enemies. In fact, he did not regard rival states as “enemies” but as temporary obstacles to his effort to increase his country’s security. Having achieved his goal by creating “Germany,” he endeavored to restore good relations with those states that had been humbled by Prussian arms. During the period from 1871-90, no one worked for peace in Europe with more skill and resolve than the Iron Chancellor.

**BISMARCK HAD NO DESIRE FOR IMPERIAL ADVENTURES OR FOR INTERVENTIONS IN FOREIGN LANDS—AND NEITHER DID KENNAN, WHO DID NOT “THINK IT OUR BUSINESS TO TRY TO DETERMINE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES.”**

Bismarck had no desire for imperial adventures or for interventions in foreign lands—and neither did Kennan, who did not “think it our business to try to determine political developments in other countries.” Although not primarily attempts of that kind, the Allied interventions in north Russia and Siberia during the early months of Soviet rule were ill-conceived, as Kennan showed in the second volume of his award-winning study of Soviet-American relations, 1917-1920, *The Decision to Intervene*. After Russia left the war in March 1918, the Allies feared that war supplies in Archangel and Vladivostok, supplies they had provided, might fall into German hands. The British and Japanese therefore landed small forces to secure them.

President Wilson resisted British and French appeals to send American troops into civil-war-torn Russia—until he learned of the Czech Legion. Lenin’s government had granted the legion, comprised of Russian-born Czechs and Slovaks and former prisoners of war,

permission to move across Siberia to Vladivostok, whence Allied ships were to transport it around the world to France. As a result of a complicated series of events, however, hostilities broke out between the Czechs and the Bolsheviks. Rather than have the former shoot their way through to Vladivostok, the British and French thought they might use them to reopen the eastern front.

Wilson did not think much of the idea, but after meeting with Thomas Masaryk, the philosophy professor who was working for Czechoslovak independence, he

dispatched some 7,000 troops to Vladivostok to aid the Czechs, whom he mistakenly believed to be fighting Germans and Austrians. In the end, as Kennan made clear, neither the Americans nor their allies achieved anything of value. On the contrary, by extending military aid to the anti-Bolshevik “Whites,” the British succeeded only in compromising them. More important, Lenin and his successors could and did repeat endlessly the false charge that the Allies had launched an all-out military effort to overthrow the Soviet government.

Kennan always looked with disfavor upon talk of overthrowing the Soviet or any other government. There was, to begin with, the problem of finding a viable alternative. And even if a ready force waited in the wings, one could never be certain that it would bring about an improvement in conditions. As a cautionary tale, Kennan cited the efforts of his relative and namesake, author of the anti-tsarist *Siberia and the Exile System*, to win support for Russia’s revolutionaries—his assump-

tion having been that they would preside over a new and better Russia.

Nor did Kennan show any sympathy for proposals to spread democracy around the world. To begin with, he rejected egalitarianism because it was predicated on an observable falsehood and appealed to base instincts. It was with distaste that he recalled how Soviet rule had developed in many what Tocqueville called “a depraved taste for equality” that reduced men “to prefer equality in slavery to inequality with freedom.” Something of that same taste could be observed in Western welfare states that encouraged the belief that no one should live better than anyone else. Such *ressentiment* was foreign to Kennan, who recognized that those who lived well set a tone and standard to which others might aspire. An unapologetic elitist, he argued that elites were indispensable, to be judged by the quality of their character and the degree of their competence.

In any event, Kennan could think of no reason to suppose that democracy, in the European and American sense of the word, was the destiny of the world’s peoples. Most governments, past and present, were nondemocratic, products in most cases of the unique historical experience of a people and a region. He was not prepared to condemn every one of them because they failed to embrace what Americans believed to be the only legitimate form of government. In the words of Edmund Burke, whom he much admired, he reprobated “no form of government merely upon abstract principles.”

Kennan did not deny that millions of people lived under less than inspiring regimes, but, he added, “so what? We are not their keepers. We never will be.” Not for him, then, crusades to ensure that all governments respected “human rights,” said to be discoverable and universally binding; the notion of rights

“remote from human authorship, leads ... into philosophical thickets where I cannot follow.” While he could understand human rights as ideal projections of Western liberal principles, he could not conceive of them as already existing in the absence of a granting authority, an enforcing agency, and a set of corresponding duties.

Many evils exist in the world, but Kennan did not think it the responsibility of the United States government to root all of them out. “Government,” he wrote in an essay on morality and foreign policy, “is an agent, not a principal. Its primary obligation is to the *interests* of the national society it represents, not to the moral impulses that elements of that society may experience.” Interventions in the affairs of foreign governments in obedience to some moral imperative could only be defended, he insisted, if the practices against which they were directed were “seriously injurious to our interests, rather than just our sensibilities.”

Kennan was certain, for example, that the United States should avoid entanglements in the Near East. On his way to Moscow in 1944, he made a stop in Baghdad, where he encountered a quite formidable religious fanaticism. He thought then, as he thought later, that it was not the responsibility of the United States to improve conditions of life there; Near Eastern problems would have to be solved, if at all, by the peoples of the region. Not surprisingly, then, he evinced no sympathy for talk of “regime change” in Iraq. “I have seen,” he told an interviewer in 2002, “no evidence that we have any realistic plans for dealing with the great state of confusion in Iraqi affairs which would presumably follow even after the successful elimination of the dictator.”

Although Kennan did not object to a characterization of his general outlook as “isolationist,” what he advocated was

not isolation (it was too late for that) but a recognition of limits and a policy of restraint. He knew, of course, that the United States had made commitments, from some of which it could not simply turn away. In the 1970s, he spoke of a responsibility to Western Europe, though even then he called for a gradual withdrawal from the old continent. And although he had argued that the creation of the state of Israel was inimical to U.S. interests, he believed, when his reasoned judgment was ignored, that his country had incurred an obligation to do all in its power—“short of the actual dispatch and employment of combat forces”—to ensure the country’s survival.

There were other commitments as well, but insofar as possible Kennan wished to see them reduced in number. At the root of his defense of a less ambitious foreign policy lay his belief that Tocqueville was right when he wrote that “a democracy can only with great difficulty regulate the details of an important undertaking, persevere in a fixed design, and work out its execution in spite of serious obstacles. It cannot combine its measures with secrecy or await their consequences with patience.”

An equally important reason for that position was his conviction that the United States could influence the world most effectively by setting a moral example. To do that, however, it would have to begin to face up to pandemic crime, the widespread use of narcotics, the reluctance to censor pornography, the decay of cities, the disappearance of educational standards, the effects of mindless consumerism, and the thoughtless exploitation of nature. No self-congratulatory efforts to improve others could relieve Americans of the painful necessity of confronting themselves. ■

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*Lee Congdon is writing a book on George Kennan.*



# Special Relationship

A one-sided U.S. policy toward Israel endangers both countries' interests.

By Leon Hadar

DISCUSSING THE U.S.-ISRAELI relationship on a radio talk show recently, I discovered that Americans are misinformed about their country's ties to the Jewish state. One listener, taking it for granted that Israel maintains a formal military alliance with Washington, speculated that since "the Americans established Israel after the Holocaust, maybe we can set it up now in Florida." But contrary to this misconception, the relationship between the two countries has never been grounded in strong geostrategic roots; it reflects the sentiments and interests of powerful American groups.

Israeli politicians, unlike their counterparts in Washington, recognize this reality. They will never romanticize the U.S.-Israel connection unless they are discussing it with American visitors. Similarly, much of the analysis of the relationship in the Israeli media is concerned almost exclusively with its utilitarian aspects: Will Washington back Israeli policy? Will the U.S. Congress increase aid to Israel? Is the new American president "pro-Israeli?" *Ha'aretz* recently convened a panel of experts to follow the 2008 U.S. presidential race and issue occasional reports on "who is the best presidential candidate for Israel." (The winner in the last poll was Rudy Giuliani.)

In short, Israelis are the ultimate realpolitik buffs when it comes to their relationship with Washington. The notion that the U.S. and Israel are allied together in the cause of spreading democracy in the Middle East and worldwide would be scoffed at by Israeli

pundits. After all, their government has been strengthening its military ties with China despite U.S. opposition. Israelis are not "pro-American" because of their commitment to Jeffersonian values—the Jewish state has yet to adopt a constitution—but because they concluded that their interests and those of the U.S. are compatible now. But they see this "special relationship" not as marriage but as an affair. And like any affair, it could end.

Indeed, there was a time when Israelis were pro-Soviet and pro-French. In 1948, Stalin's Soviet Union was the most enthusiastic supporter of establishing Israel, which it hoped would be a leading anti-imperialist post in the Middle East, while Secretary of State George Marshall pressed Harry Truman not to recognize the new state, warning that it could harm America's position in the region. Hence Moscow recognized Israel immediately after the state was proclaimed and provided it with arms, while it took the Americans more than a year to grant *de jure* recognition to Israel, on which they imposed an arms embargo. At the height of the In-Russia-With-Love mood in Israel, the expectation was that the new state would remain neutral in the evolving Cold War.

Then Israel had its French kiss. It was France that served as Israel's main source of arms in the 1950s and early 1960s and helped it develop its nuclear arsenal. Israel was embracing then a European orientation and forming close ties with an emerging Franco-German bloc to help resist U.S. pressure to end its nuclear program. The Israeli alliance

with France reached a peak in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez campaign during which the two conspired (with Britain and against U.S. wishes) to oust Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. Their interests were seen to be compatible as the French tried to suppress the Nasser-backed struggle for independence in Algeria. But after Charles de Gaulle's decision to grant independence to Algeria, the relationship between Israel and France cooled; they soured after Israel rejected the aging French leader's advice not to attack Egypt in 1967.

It was only after Israel's 1967 victory over Egypt, a Soviet ally, that the intellectual predecessors of today's neoconservatives started popularizing the idea of Israel as an American "strategic asset" in the Middle East. Similarly, neoconservatives in the Reagan administration argued that Israel should become America's leading ally in the region during the renewed Cold War tensions, while depicting the Palestine Liberation Organization as a Soviet stooge. But even as Israel and the U.S. were strengthening their ties, there was recognition in both governments of the strategic constraints on their relationship. America could not maintain its position in the Middle East without establishing a presence in the Arab world, while Israel's friendship with America could not substitute for the acceptance of Israel by its Arab neighbors. Washington's efforts to bring about Middle East peace were part of a strategy to advance U.S. and Israeli interests.

Indeed, Washington's ability to play the role of an honest broker between

Israel and Egypt (and Syria) after the 1973 Middle East War was only made possible when Richard Nixon re-established diplomatic ties with Cairo, co-opting it into the pro-American camp. It was the even-handed U.S. role that made it possible for Jimmy Carter to mediate the historic peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1979 and for George H.W. Bush to launch a round of Israeli-Arab negotiations after the Gulf War in 1991 that resulted in the peace accords between Israel and the PLO and Jordan. Hence, from an Israeli perspective that regards peace with the Arabs as a top national interest, the pressure by Nixon, Carter, and Bush to withdraw from occupied Arab territories in exchange for peace reflected a genuinely pro-Israeli direction of U.S. policy since the agreements with Egypt, the Palestinians, and Jordan advanced the Jewish state's long-term strategic interests. But if you were listening to the proponents of Greater Israel in Jerusalem and Washington, Nixon, Carter, and Bush were the enemies of Jewish people.

At the same time, a realist analysis of Israeli interests would have concluded that there was nothing pro-Israeli in the willingness of the Reagan administration to treat with benign neglect Israel's creeping annexation of the West Bank, creating the conditions for the outbreak of the first Intifada, or in giving Israel a yellow light to invade Lebanon in 1982. Those U.S. policies reflected the agenda of Likud and its neoconservative partners, with their emphasis on propping up the "strategic asset" by placing the Palestinian issue on the backburner and punishing the "pro-Soviet" PLO. They resulted in the rise of Palestinian and Shi'ite terrorism aimed against both the Jewish state and the U.S. and damaged core Israeli and American interests.

The same kind of geostrategic paradox—an American administration that

**It pays to Google.** The Shura Council, the co-ordinating body for Iraqi Sunni insurgents, and al-Qaeda in Iraq, comprised mainly of foreign Sunni Islamic militants, have been working together using the Google map feature to plan their sector-by-sector ethnic cleansing of Shi'a Muslims in central Iraq. The cleansing has removed Shi'a from many areas, but the discovery that the Sunni insurgents are using the Google map has allowed analysts to predict where the next wave of killings will take place, though not necessarily to stop them. Shi'a death squads, apparently less Google proficient, are reacting to every instance of Sunni cleansing by killing Sunnis at random in areas they control. U.S. patrols, working aggressively to prevent the religious murders, have become a prominent target for both sides and are caught squarely in the middle of the internecine violence, making October one of the worst months ever for American casualties.



**In spite of the billions of dollars spent on air security over the past five years, very little air cargo is checked or x-rayed either in the United States or in Europe.**

According to sources in the airline industry, more than 70 percent of air cargo is categorized as "known shipper," which means that it is not considered to be suspect and is normally not inspected. Such known shippers include major companies like UPS and FedEx, but smaller, private freight agencies are also in the same category even though their security procedures are not known and are not monitored. In Europe most air cargo goes on passenger aircraft down in the hold, not on specially designed cargo planes, which are more common in the U.S. This means that a terrorist in Europe could target a civilian airliner using a bomb with a timer in an airfreight package and be reasonably certain that it will not be inspected and will wind up in the hold of a plane carrying passengers. Other reports suggest that the specialized cargo planes also continue to be highly vulnerable to hijacking or bombing due to poor security at cargo terminals. European and American air-security experts are aware of the problems associated with air cargo but both government and the airline industry claim that inspection of each package is not feasible because of lack of resources and because it would bring the airfreight system to a halt. This response is, of course, nonsensical. A small fraction of the money and manpower being wasted in Iraq would make American air cargo completely safe.



**According to Israeli sources involved with the post-mortem on the summer war in Lebanon, Hezbollah routinely listened to Israeli cellphone conversations,**

including those of officers, as part of its extensive intelligence-gathering efforts and was also able to eavesdrop electronically on messages sent to pagers, including some that were transmitted through military-satellite uplinks. Exploiting its intercepts, Hezbollah successfully collected critical information on Israeli army units and their movements, both inside and outside Lebanon. The Israelis, who had been contemptuous of Hezbollah's intelligence-gathering abilities, are now reported to be astonished at the sophistication of the operation.

*Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a partner in Cannistraro Associates.*

is tagged as “pro-Israeli” but whose policies damage the longstanding interests of the Jewish state—will be recalled as one of the legacies of George W. Bush. After 9/11, and against the backdrop of the second Intifada and the Iraq War, a new generation of neoconservatives succeeded in marketing to another White House the notion that the U.S. and Israel were now being brought together in a strategic alliance against “Islamofascism.” This alliance would operate with America as sheriff and Israel as its deputy while Israeli-Palestinian peace is placed on the backburner. Bush and his advisers see America’s battle with Iraq and Israel’s battle with the Palestinians as part of the same war, according to *Ha’aretz* chief political analyst, Akiva Eldar. “They have actually suggested

that Israel will help the United States to take over the Middle East,” Eldar said. “They were sitting in think tanks that believed that you don’t even try to appease or satisfy the Arabs, you reach peace by force which means you impose it [and] you don’t make concessions to people you don’t trust, and that puts them and Sharon in the same party.”

Consider the results of U.S. policies—the coming to power of radical Shi’ites in Baghdad and the strengthening influence of Iran and its allies; the radicalization of the Palestinians, the election of Hamas, and an environment less conducive for Arab-Israeli peace; the growing isolation of the U.S. and Israel in the Middle East, in Europe, and around the world. Is it surprising that Israelis are asking: if we have a pro-Israeli administration in Washington, how would a anti-Israeli one look?

These Israeli sentiments have become more prevalent in the aftermath of the recent war in Lebanon in which the high costs of the Israeli-American “strategic alliance” became quite evident to both sides. Washington had given Israel a green light to attack Hezbollah in Lebanon as a way of punishing its patrons, Iran and Syria. But Israel proved to be more of a strategic burden than asset, hurting the interests of a pro-American government in Beirut and eroding what remains of U.S. credibility in the Middle East. “Hezbollah’s unprovoked attack on July 12 provided Israel the extraordinary opportunity to demonstrate its utility by making a major contribution to America’s war on terrorism,” wrote Charles Krauthammer, insisting that America “has been disappointed” by Israeli failure to defeat Hezbollah.

But if Americans have realized that Israel might not be a strategic asset, some Israelis have maintained that they are uninterested in playing that prescribed pro-U.S. role. After all, Israel, as

*Ha’aretz* columnist Doron Rosenblum put it, “was not established in order to be a spearhead against global Islam, or in order to serve as an alert squad for the Western world.” But that is exactly the role that the neocons have assigned to Israel, which has led Daniel Levy, a former aide to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, to propose that “disentangling Israeli interests from the rubble of neocon ‘creative destruction’ in the Middle East has become an urgent challenge for Israeli policy-makers.” An America that seeks to reshape the region “through an unsophisticated mixture of bombs and ballots, devoid of local contextual understanding, alliance-building or redressing of grievances, ultimately undermines both itself and Israel,” Levy wrote.

Moreover, the neoconservative paradigm is bound make Israel a modern-day crusader state, an outlet of a global power whose political, economic, and military headquarters are on the other side of the world. America’s commitment to the security of the Israeli province would always remain uncertain and fragile, reflecting changes in the balance of power in Washington and the shifting dynamics of U.S. politics.

Therefore, if Israel is limited in its ability to provide security services to the United States, American hegemony cannot make the Middle East safe for Israel. Perhaps it is not too late for the Israelis to figure out how to take a path that leads to peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians and their other neighbors in generations to come. A U.S. administration promoting that goal would be pursuing a policy that is both pro-American and pro-Israel and would find an ally in a realist Israeli leadership. ■

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# The End of History

Richard Hofstadter made his career distorting the past for the sake of the present.

By Chilton Williamson Jr.

CHESTERTON SAID that people will miss anything provided that thing is big enough. He might have added that this seems especially the case when the fact of its existence is explicitly stated, explicit statements being as easily ignored as looming objects are readily overlooked.

I was reminded of this not long ago when I read the epigraph of an excellent intellectual biography by David S. Brown of the late American historian Richard Hofstadter, who died in 1970. This epigraph, by a former student of Hofstadter's, reads in part:

My model of the historian engaged in the controversies of the day appears in many varieties. In his own day, and his own way, Richard Hofstadter was an exemplar of the engaged historian. Hofstadter was intensely concerned with the political issues of his time and wrote history as a contribution to contemporary political discussion. ... He wanted to recover the past but that was only part of what he considered the historian's larger job: to explore how we in the present should think about the past and present and to persuasively convey those critical reflections to his readers.

As a trained historian myself, alert to a hoary historical controversy when I meet it, I set Brown's biography aside and took down a slim volume ignored since my graduate school days: *The Whig Interpretation of History* by Herbert Butterfield, Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University, published first in 1931.

"I should like to feel," Sir Harold Nicolson wrote, "that all teachers and pupils of history would purchase and ponder this intelligent essay." As with so many other of Sir Harold's hopes for civilization, this one appears to have gone unfulfilled. *The Whig Interpretation* is an eminently civilized plea on behalf of a proper understanding of history that has gone widely unheeded by professional historians in the past three-quarters of a century. Butterfield was concerned with countering what he described as

the tendency in many historians to write on the side of the Protestants and Whigs, to praise revolutions provided they have been successful, to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present.

Against this impulse which, he acknowledges, represents "an unexamined habit of mind that any historian may fall into," he urged "the love of the past for the sake of the past," the "fervour that was awakened in Gibbon and Gregorovius by the sight of the ruins of ancient Rome." "By imaginative sympathy," Butterfield proposed, the historian

makes the past intelligible to the present. He translates its conditioning circumstances into terms which we today can understand. It is in this sense that history must always be written from the point of view of the present. It is in this sense that every age will have to write its history over again.

At issue, really, is the question of whether the historian should strive to be a literary artist or a *parti pris* journalist eager to promote a more or less ephemeral agendum.

Hofstadter is best remembered for *The American Political Tradition* and *The Age of Reform*. The theme of the first book is the radical discontinuity between the rural, Protestant, individualist, and property-rights tradition that was eclipsed with the Hoover administration and the urban, pluralistic, liberal-socialist, urban, and collectivist regime that replaced it. The burden of the second is the fundamentally un-Progressive nature of Populist-Progressivism, understood by Hofstadter as an essentially reactionary movement created and directed by old-stock Americans for the purpose of containing the recently-arrived ethnic immigrants and restraining the captains of industry who, between them, threatened to destroy the old Yankee civilization. In working up the second thesis, the author kept the immediate present very much in mind. The Old America, he sensed, was dead. The WASP establishment was passing, and its passage was not just the great event of the 20th century but of American history since colonial times, of greater significance than the drafting of the Constitution by a capitalist-dominated Convention, the closing of the critically formative frontier, and the rise of the Midwestern Reform movement in the second half of the 19th century, events described by Charles Beard, Frederick Jackson Turner, and Merle Curti—three giants of the immediately previous generation of American

historians—respectively. Hofstadter, who as a young man had contemplated a career in journalism and in later life admitted he was as much an essayist as an historian, or more so, in these as in most of his other books produced what amounts to the Higher Journalism, as distinguished from works of serious historical investigation.

Yet when we consider the careers of the three men noted above, what do we find really to be the difference between their work and Hofstadter's? Despite the warmth he felt toward Beard as a scholar, and a friendship with his mentor, Merle Curti, Hofstadter seems to have entertained a vaguely condescending attitude toward the writings of both men, while his feelings with respect to Turner's were positively hostile. The man's ideas, he thought, were dangerously regressive, an encouragement to the historical profession to glorify both Bryan's backward-looking politics and a long-gone agrarian society. Hofstadter regarded Charles Beard as a literary politician working to promote the Progressive agenda—as Beard himself readily admitted. As for Curti, his view of the American Midwest as the source of all that was virtuous and honest and upright—in a word, democratic—in American society galled this half-Jewish son of an immigrant father raised in Buffalo, New York. The point worth noting, of course, is that these men were *engagé* historians in their own generation, moulded alike by the political enthusiasms of the period.

If Hofstadter was remarkable as a historian, it was rather for his impressionistic and essayistic approach to the writing of history, not his whiggish perspective on it. Indeed, the whiggish perspective has been the curse of American historical literature, from George Bancroft and Francis Parkman down to the present day. Herbert Baxter Adams, John W. Burgess, Ulrich B. Phillips, Vernon L. Parrington, Perry Miller, Allen Nevins, Henry Steele

Commager, Daniel Boorstin, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.—all wrote essentially from this viewpoint. Bancroft and Parkman both celebrated the American Republic of their day as it wished to see itself: the creation of, and ultimate testament to, Protestant religion and the Anglo-Saxon race, a progressive nation with a glorious future that had established itself as the moral exemplar to the world. Turner presented the history of the United States as the protracted push of the frontier accomplished by the hardy, heroic, and ingenious Anglo-Saxon celebrated by racial “scientists” of the era, and Parrington argued that American literature was inspired by the spirit of the democratic idealism that was an idol of his time, derived almost exclusively from Anglo-French roots. Beard's *Economic Origins of the Constitution of the United States* is unambiguously the offspring of the Progressive crusade. Similarly, in *The Age of Jackson*, Schlesinger drew a direct connection between Jacksonian Democracy and Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. What all these historians have in common, in addition to the perspective of engagement, is the fact of their having been general historians writing “big” books—what Butterfield called abridgments, “short cut[s] through th[e] complexity” of history. “The theory,” he wrote,

that is behind the whig interpretation—the theory that we study the past for the sake of the present—is one that is really introduced for the purpose of facilitating the abridgment of history; and its effect is to provide us with a handy rule of thumb by which we can easily discover what was important in the past, for the simple reason that, by definition, we mean what is important ‘from our point of view.’

The whig historical mind has never been identical with the English mind, if only because—as Butterfield noted—

the whig historian was “the very model of the 19th century gentleman.” But the appeal of the whiggish view of history to the popular American mind should be obvious: progressive, positivist, pragmatic, philistine—above all, presentist. Tocqueville wrote: “Not content to show how events have occurred, [historians in democratic times] pride themselves on proving that they could not have happened differently. They see a nation that has reached a certain point in history, and they assert that it was bound to have followed the path that led it there.”

Here we have the explanation for the whiggish tradition in American historical writing of the generalist sort. Yet beginning with Hofstadter and his generation of American historians, whiggery attained to a higher, more ambitious, and more impertinent level. The Progressive historians coming immediately before them aimed at determining the future by providing, in Beard's words, “the tools for progressive social change.” Their goal was never to claim for themselves the past—for the very good reason that they regarded the past with confidence as belonging to them and to their ancestors. The next generation, by comparison, arising from the new, pluralistic America, looked backward as well as forward with the conscious intent to appropriate America's past, in addition to shaping its future, to itself. This it accomplished by establishing a counterfeit continuity; arguing, in effect, that because America had become something else, it had always been so—or rather, that that something had been implicit from the beginning.

The difference in these two attitudes, which amounts to one between confidence and chutzpah, seems pretty much the difference between the Old America and the New. ■

*Chilton Williamson Jr. is Senior Editor for Books at Chronicles.*

# Arts & Letters

## FILM

[*Flags of Our Fathers*]

### Proof Through the Night

By Steve Sailer

WITH PLANNING UNDERWAY for aerial attacks on Iran's dug-in nuclear facilities, it's worth recalling Iwo Jima, which "underwent the most prolonged and also the most disappointing air bombing and naval bombardment of any Pacific Island," according to Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison. The Japanese commander hollowed out the lava of that volcanic island, allowing his 22,000 troops to survive seven months of almost daily American air raids. Hoping to show Washington that an invasion of Japan would be too bloody, they killed nearly 7,000 American attackers and wounded 21,000 more in a five-week-long battle in which all but 216 defenders died.

American commanders in the Pacific normally expended their men's lives economically, preferring to use instead our advantage in maneuver and materiel. When out-thought at Iwo Jima by General Kuribayashi, however, they were rescued by the extraordinary morale of their Marines.

Iwo Jima is best remembered for Joe Rosenthal's news photograph of the flag raising on Mt. Suribachi, in which he caught on film a half-dozen Marines accidentally forming a tableaux worthy of Michelangelo.

The picture has generated both myths and counter-myths. It's natural to

assume the flag was put up under heavy enemy fire and marked the final conquest of the island. In reality, it happened during a rare lull in the hostilities, which raged for another month. Yet contrary to so many confident assertions, it was not staged. Despite the technicalities of the historical record—this was actually the second flag raising that day, for reasons too tedious to recount here—the photo indeed captured the essential heroism of a battle in which 27 Medals of Honor were earned, compared to only three over the last three decades.

Following the 1994 death of the photo's central figure, medic John Bradley, one of his eight children, James Bradley, set out to uncover the life stories of the six flag-raisers. The elder Bradley, a popular small-town mortician, had never told his son much about the war besides, "The heroes of Iwo Jima are the guys who didn't come back." The son believes his father's reticence was due to his best friend having been seized by Japanese soldiers and dragged underground, where he was tortured to death.

Bradley's book *Flags of Our Fathers* was a deserved bestseller. Now director Clint Eastwood has turned it into a solidly made but rather confusing and slightly sour-spirited film, which almost misses the book's point that while raising the flag was unheroic, everything else this random sample of Marines did affirmed Admiral Chester Nimitz's tribute: "On the Iwo island, uncommon valor was a common virtue."

Ensemble movies are not well suited for war stories because viewers can't tell apart more than four clean-shaven young men in helmets and uniforms, much less the eight main characters in "Flags of Our Fathers." With Eastwood's last two movies winning four acting

Oscars (Sean Penn and Tim Robbins in "Mystic River" and Hilary Swank and Morgan Freeman in "Million Dollar Baby"), he could have recruited as many famous faces as Martin Scorsese did for his more lucid hit "The Departed." For some reason—perhaps his notorious stinginess—Eastwood chose obscure names, with Doc Bradley played by Ryan Phillippe, who is best known as Mr. Reese Witherspoon.

Exacerbating the muddle is the incessant cross-cutting between three timelines: the son's research in the 1990s; the battle; and the three survivors being dragooned into a subsequent war-bond drive back home, which drove Ira Hayes, the America Indian, to drink. The audience gasped in horror when a white bartender announced that he doesn't serve Indians although Native American statesmen from Tecumseh onward have been demanding just that.

The indignities of being mindlessly adulated for a level of courage that is nothing special in your profession seems to interest Eastwood most, but it was more wittily dissected in "The Right Stuff."

One advantage of the convoluted editing scheme is that the scenes of combat carnage would be unbearable if Eastwood didn't frequently cut away to, say, a sozzled Hayes brawling with embarrassed cops. Cinematic soldiers, like John Wayne in "Sands of Iwo Jima," used to die unrealistically bloodless deaths, but ever since "Saving Private Ryan," war movies have competed to showcase the most hideous wounds. Mel Gibson's "We Were Soldiers" specialized in blood spurting from arteries, but "Flags of Our Fathers" sets a new record for goriest disembowelments. ■

Rated R for violence and language.



## BOOKS

[*Point to Point Navigation: A Memoir, Gore Vidal, Doubleday, 272 pages*]

## The Populist Patriotism of Gore Vidal

By Bill Kauffman

"CONTRARY TO LEGEND," writes Gore Vidal in *Point to Point Navigation*, the second (and presumably final) volume of his memoirs, "I was born of mortal woman." He passed into this world in the Cadet Hospital at West Point, an institution he would later write about with the keenest insight and even affection. (As a boy he loved to play with toy lead soldiers, though "Today they would be proscribed because war is bad and women under-represented in their ranks.")

The century into which Gore Vidal was born—which modest Yankees would not think of calling the American Century; that would be the conceit of the silly son of Chinese missionaries—had reached the quarter pole. Mr. Wilson's unsuccessful attempt to remould America into a militarized police state was a queer and fading memory. Normalcy was upon the land. Genius, too. Writes Vidal: "In 1925, the year that I was born, *An American Tragedy*, *Arrowsmith*, *Manhattan Transfer*, and *The Great Gatsby* were published. A nice welcoming gift, I observed to the Three Wise Men from PEN who attended me in my cradle."

The boy's father, Gene Vidal, former West Point fullback and Olympic decathlete, taught aeronautics at the U.S. Military Academy and later helped found the airline that would become TWA. Gene seems to have been a bit of dreamer; he was convinced that before

too many years every American would have his own airplane. If, instead, every American male wound up with Social Security and draft cards, well, you can't blame a guy for his reveries. Gene may or may not have had a fling with aviatrix (a now verboten word!) Amelia Earhart, but Gore is not about to fault his father for infidelity. "The serenity of [Gene's] nature," says his son, "was in benign contrast to my mother's raging nature."

Nina Vidal was "a composite of Bette Davis and Joan Crawford," a kind of Mommie Dearest who married the main chance, in her case the moneybags Hugh D. Auchincloss, thus making Gore Vidal a stepbrother to the future Jackie Kennedy Onassis through a concatenation of upper-class remarriages. Vidal draws the appropriate lesson: "Oh, what a tangled web is woven when divorcees conceive."

One might not associate Gore Vidal with "family values," even had that phrase not become a cynical advertising slogan exploited by adulterous Republicans, but in fact family has often been his concern. He writes here, as he has so often before, about his father and his maternal grandfather, the blind Oklahoma Senator Thomas P. Gore, with a filial reverence. These were the men he took for his models. They served him well, if uncommonly.

**A PATRIOT, HE IS CALLED ANTI-AMERICAN BY THOSE WHO CAN'T BE BOTHERED TO FIND OUT WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE CRAZY OLD AMERICA BEFORE THE ADVENT OF ATOMIC BOMBS, MCGEORGE BUNDY, AND THE FILMS OF TONY CURTIS.**

And of course the country itself constitutes Vidal's extended family, or at least it did. Though Vidal is beyond question one of the finest essayists ever to use the language, his greatest achievement may be his "Narratives of Empire," the septology of historical novels which covers the rise of the American Republic and its tragic, enraging fall (felled, as it happens, by the American Empire). His subject is "the Republic's history, which I have always regarded as a family

affair." He is the nation's biographer, which is why those who would efface our history or deny that anything much happened prior to 1941 detest Vidal. A patriot, he is called anti-American by those who can't be bothered to find out what was going on in the crazy old America before the advent of atomic bombs, McGeorge Bundy, and the films of Tony Curtis.

Senator Gore, to whom the young Vidal read the *Congressional Record*, impressed upon the boy that the populists, however maligned by the establishment, kept alive the spirit of '76. Of his grandfather, an ally of Bryan and enemy of Wilson and FDR, Vidal writes, "He was a genuine populist; but he did not like people very much. He always said no to anyone who wanted government aid." (Equal rights for all, special privileges for none, as the populist motto went.) Senator Gore, says his grandson, was "the first and, I believe, last senator from an oil state to die without a fortune."

Senator Gore was one of the earliest and most vigorous sponsors of a constitutional amendment to require a popular referendum on any congressional declaration of war. The boy Vidal saw firsthand just how hard the whip comes down on men who take a stand for peace. "[P]opulists," he learned, "have

never had a good press in Freedom's land." Herein, as in previous books, Vidal defends the America First Committee and his childhood hero Charles Lindbergh against the slanders of the War Party.

He entertainingly depicts Huey Long, the good-humored antimilitarist whose death at the hands of the soon-to-be-clichéd lone nut removed a formidable challenger from FDR's path to perpetual presidency. Huey lived in

the same Connecticut Avenue apartment building as did Gene Vidal, and Gore's father recounted Long's lectures to a meek young desk clerk: "Why, when I was your age I would spend what little idle time I had with an instructive book not that racing form I see that you're now trying to hide. Of course I was not given to late-night dissipation in the fleshpots of the District of Columbia! Oh, you can't hide your ruinous habits from me! I can see by the trembling of your hands what demon rum is doing to you..."

Vidal supplies the punchline: "Only my father's arrival with his car would stop the great flow of language, and Huey would cadge a ride from the director of air commerce while lecturing my father on aviation."

Vidal wrote about his World War II service in *Palimpsest* (1995), his previous memoir, and in the decade since he has not joined the Greatest Generation orgy: "during the three years I spent in the army I never heard a single patriotic remark from a fellow soldier, only grief for friends lost and, almost as often, a fierce grievance felt for those back home who were decimating our adolescent generation." Cue a Brokavian sigh.

Grief for friends lost. This is the pre-siding mood of *Point to Point Navigation*. The book is about death; almost all of its personae (Tennessee Williams, Johnny Carson, Saul Bellow, Paul Bowles, Federico Fellini) are on the other side of corporeity. Vidal also writes movingly of Howard Austen, his partner of 53 years, who died of lung cancer in 2003, when "we" ceased to be we and became "I."

As a "third-generation atheist" and "absolute nonbeliever" he takes no solace in the promise of eternal life, though you can't beat the view from his future resting place: Rock Creek Cemetery in the District of Columbia, hard by Henry and Clover Adams and Saint-Gaudens's "Grief" statue. "Two or three yards away Howard is buried as I shall be in due course when I take time off from my busy schedule," he writes. One

imagines Vidal and Adams, the two disappointed sons of our disappearing (disappeared?) Republic, trading aperçus unto time's end. Oh to be a fly on the sepulcher wall in that afterworld!

The author notes his own physical deterioration, though it appears the wit is the last to go. He is, as ever, just plain funny. Here is Vidal on vanity: "Generally, a narcissist is anyone anyone better looking than you are." And on standing up for the infant son of friends: "Always a godfather, never a god."

Or here is Vidal on Greta Garbo, whose favorite reading material was *Silver Screen*: "She kept up with all the new stars though I can't imagine she saw many of their pictures, but when it came to Fabian's romantic life she was au courant."

Vidal turned 81 in October, but he takes no pride in having outlived the subject of his life's work. "Our old original Republic does seem to be well and truly gone," he says in a line freighted with sadness. A son, a loving if irreverent son, of that old Republic has watched the precious thing die, and a new entity, bearing the same name, but "more and more secretive and remote not to mention repressive," supplant it.

"Didn't it go by awfully fast?" a dying Howard Austen asked Vidal. It sure did.

Gore Vidal is an American original. No, make that an original American. He despises cant, hypocrisy, foreign wars, and martial intellectuals on the make. He cherishes the old American Republic. I laugh aloud reading him. I take heart that he is still out there, an improbable—but, when you think about it, perfectly and delightfully meet—blend of Edmund Wilson and Huey Long, T.P. Gore and Henry Adams.

"As I now move graciously, I hope, toward the door marked Exit," Vidal begins one sentence. Don't go yet, Gore. Henry Adams can wait. We American patriots have so much left to do. ■

*Bill Kauffman's most recent book is Look Homeward, America: In Search of Reactionary Radicals and Front-Porch Anarchists (ISI Books).*

[*Five Germanys I Have Known, Fritz Stern, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 546 pages*]

## From Breslau to Morningside Heights

By Philip Weiss

FRITZ STERN was supposed to follow in the family calling of three generations and become a doctor in the German city of Breslau (now Wroclaw in Poland). Events interceded. In 1932, when he was 6, his parents gave him a typewriter, and then next year Hitler came to power. Five years after, the family, who were Christians but of Jewish stock, fled for America. The boy had by then become the family's secretary and was hoarding pieces of writing that interested him, down to scraps of newspaper. He grew up to be a historian, publishing several important volumes about German and Jewish history, of which this beautifully-written memoir is the most soulful. In a sense Stern never abandoned the family profession: at 80, he is trying to heal himself and heal Germany—and even heal the Jews.

Stern loves Germany, and his memoir is best understood as a demonstration that all societies are vulnerable to the evil forces that swept that land in the '30s and '40s. His epiphany came on a trip he made back to Germany in 1954, to attend a tenth-year memorial service for the July plot by German officers to kill Hitler, a plot that led instead to the torture and execution of the brave conspirators. "As I looked at the people in the courtyard—old, distinguished, and sadly proud, dressed in mourning, faces hardened and humbled by suffering—I felt a sense of shame for my indiscriminate hatred of Germans," he writes. The accumulation of such moments forced Stern at a late age to overcome his natural reluctance to write about himself. He understands

what an unusual life he has had and how instructive it can be.

The first of Stern's five Germanys was the Weimar Republic. He was born in 1926 into the assimilated Jewish elite. Jews had risen to new prominence in "most realms of public life," but that did not keep them from "self-criticism," sometimes joking, sometimes "harsh." Religion tended to be a private matter, but everyone knew who was what.

His grandparents had converted to Christianity, yet the family never abandoned its Jewish identity, its sense of an elite intellectual inheritance. The complexity of the situation can be seen in the case of Stern's godfather, the Nobel Prize-winning chemist Fritz Haber, a friend of Zionist Chaim Weizmann and the inventor of a poison gas that was later used by the Nazis. Haber was a convert. But he was somehow able "to fuse a nominal Christian identity with a kind of civic religion, Germanness, and a private Jewish identity..."

Private became public with the Third Reich. For years the Stern family bargained that the nationalistic nonsense about Aryans would not last, even as the civil service was purged by the 1935 Nuremberg laws and Jewish doctors were stripped of public duties (to the satisfaction of many German doctors, who couldn't compete).

Young Stern knew now that he was Jewish. He attended a gymnasium at which math problems were framed in terms of, "If three Jews rob a bank..." and on a family outing he read a piece of doggerel on a sign outside a village: "Trust not the fox on the green heath, and not the Jew when he gives his oath."

Eight decades later, the author asks, "Why does this piece of filthy trash remain in my head?" The answer is obvious: this was living history.

Most of my classmates were in the Hitler Youth, and on special days (the Fuhrer's birthday, for example) they would appear in their uniforms. Even without them, their pride in things German and Nazi and their joy in communal belong-

ing were tangible. At times I was a target of verbal and, in the schoolyard, physical assault ... I have forgotten, or perhaps repressed, much of the unpleasantness, probably because it was so minor compared with the horrors visited later on others, but I do remember the indoctrinations, the celebratory assemblies, the Heil Hitlers that I neither could nor would say, the hateful songs, the party sermons...

In 1938, the Stern family escaped, and Stern's father relaunched his medical practice in New York, though it seems that young Fritz held the family together. At 12, he was composing the correspondence for his shell-shocked family, reading Thucydides, and going to a Hoboken pier to greet other refugees. How many other boys would have spotted Thomas Mann and his brother in the crowd?

Portraiture became Stern's strong suit. He made his name with a study of three early German nationalists and anti-Semites and solidified it with a study of Gerson Bleichroder, a Jewish banker who advised Bismarck. For nearly 50 years, Stern was a professor at Columbia University. In that time, he gained access to many a powerful chamber and, happily, this book includes some reports.

There is Henry Kissinger, who would have been a high-school teacher in Furth, he tells Stern, were it not for Hitler. When Stern criticizes Nixon, the secretary of state responds, "Don't forget, he is not my president," a reminder that he had supported Rockefeller. "What sublime disloyalty!" Stern comments.

When he meets Pope John Paul II, Stern tells him that Asian-Americans have taken the place of American Jews in schools. The pope says, "Yes, but they still control the media and finance." (Stern says, "I was stunned.")

Leading Jews from Einstein to Weizmann also make appearances. The historian Isaiah Berlin refuses to shake Menachem Begin's hand, for he remembers the Jewish terrorism of the 1940s. The Zionist Nahum Goldmann comes to Ger-

many to negotiate reparations and says that Jews are "a people one can admire but one cannot love. They are wonderful when they are persecuted. They are impossible when they have it good."

As the author returns to Germany again and again, the reader sees that he is German at the core. In a book that involves identity, what does core mean? The feeling arises from Stern's story that he is made by the German language and longs for the sensibilities that German words are able to pluck. Those words come in and out of the book. *Schmökern*, the love of light reading. *Schlicht*, a kind of simple, unostentatious elegance. *Lebensluge*, a lie on which a life is based. *Wissenschaft*, the body of documented knowledge. Nietzsche and Goethe are frequently cited and so is the idea that is central to Stern's sense of himself: *Bildung*, the "goal of self-formation and education that sprang in part from knowing and exulting in the great works of culture..."

OK, then: explain Nazism. "Never before had a modern, educated, proudly civilized class so readily abandoned, betrayed, and traduced the most basic rights of citizens. Why? Fear? Willing acquiescence and complicity? Indifference? The questions haunt us still." Stern's best answer is that the religious and nationalist appeals that carried away a fearful and humiliated people can carry away other high-minded cultures. For all states struggle with "illiberal" forces and periods of "exaltation." (As do rival administrators at Columbia: "If they had nuclear weapons, I thought, they would use them.")

I can only hope that Stern's comments about Israel get publicity. They are so understated yet backed by such intimate knowledge of anti-Semitism and the Zionist brain trust that no one can write them off. The last of the 20th-century utopias is now endangered by "self-betrayal," militarism and nationalism. Israelis are incapable of accepting criticism from foreigners. Indeed the Holocaust seems to have hardened them in their contempt for critics. But Stern has studied the "harsh truths" of Israel's 1948 war for independence and is per-

plexed by the public denial of evidence that Zionists forced a flood of Arabs from the land—"a pertinent question, especially for those of us concerned about 'forgetting.'" Unlike so many other prominent Americans who have been to Israel and simply marveled at the society, Stern has also visited the West Bank and is grieved by the occupation. Palestinian refugees "had been made to suffer for the crimes of omission and commission that the Europeans had committed against the Jews."

I wish he had brought these lessons home. The chief fault of this book is Stern's resistance to taking on the historian's "metaphysical fluency and ... arrogance" (intellectual qualities he praises in Hannah Arendt) when it comes to Jewish history in the United States. He does not apply to the American scene his knowledge of Bleichroder's presence at Bismarck's side or of the German nationalists' fury toward modernity. This reader kept waiting for Stern's opinion on such issues as: How powerful are Jews in America? How does their role in the economy and the professions compare to Weimar? The obvious question is of course whether our society is capable of seeking the extermination of Jews, but just as interesting is whether the Jewish role in the American establishment has hampered our ability to relate to the Arab world. As it is, the neoconservatives are only glimpsed here, for instance in a crack about how much money Richard Perle has made.

I found one lesson between the lines. In 1954 Stern is traveling on a boat back to Germany when he hears the news of the Supreme Court's landmark desegregation decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The reader exults with him: a great blot was removed from his adopted society, and Stern was able to bring out to Europe a demonstration of the noble American experiment. That was a very long time ago. ■

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[*Bully Boy: The Truth About Theodore Roosevelt's Legacy*, Jim Powell, Crown Forum, 336 pages]

## Truth to Executive Power

By Thomas E. Woods Jr.

A FAIRLY RELIABLE rule of thumb when it comes to books on history and politics is that whatever *Publishers Weekly* advises you to do, spare no expense in doing the exact opposite.

An excellent case in point is Jim Powell's new book, *Bully Boy: The Truth About Theodore Roosevelt's Legacy*. Its author, *Publishers Weekly* informs us, "sees Roosevelt as a dangerous tyrant who sought to expand the power of the executive office in order to promote his own interests." Powell's book is "irresponsible revisionism at its worst."

Now you might think *Publishers Weekly*, in the Age of Bush, would be more inclined than usual to look with sympathy on a book that holds the executive branch, and those who contributed to its expansion, up to fresh scrutiny, but being a 21st-century liberal means attributing all government wickedness to the uniquely perverse George W. Bush. The possibility that the Source of All Iniquity may be building upon precedents set by his predecessors, including those who our intellectual class has told us belong to the ranks of our "great presidents," is to be rejected with a kind of indignant horror.

Powell's study of TR is truly withering. It's one thing to argue that taxes are too high, that eminent domain has been abused, or that maybe Bill Clinton shouldn't have bombed that pharmaceutical plant in Sudan. What's so "irresponsible" about Powell's book is that it goes well beyond obvious cases like these and looks critically even at those government initiatives that everyone knows are indispensable and wonderful and that are taught to schoolchildren as evidence of the marvels of democracy.

Responsible people stick to the script: the state protects you, the state fosters prosperity, the state pursues justice, and without the state every one of you would revert instantly to barbarism. The cartoon version of TR's presidency that Powell seeks to overturn reinforces these civic myths, which is why our betters so often trot him out as a "great" or "near-great" president.

Thus the very accomplishments that the standard text cites on behalf of TR's greatness are what Powell uses to hang him. It hasn't exactly hurt TR's reputation that arguments on his behalf fit neatly into the space of a bumper sticker ("He made our food safe!" "He tamed big business!" "He protected the environment!"), while the inevitably more nuanced and accurate rendition of these historical episodes requires many pages of explanation. That, at last, is what Jim Powell has done in *Bully Boy*.

Decades before Powell's book there was Henry Pringle's unflattering study, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Biography*, but Pringle's analysis was uneven, and in any case his book is long out of print. Powell's book differs from Pringle's in that, rather than being merely an unfavorable biography, it is a self-conscious critique of Roosevelt and his legacy.

That critique is especially refreshing given the cross-ideological adulation that TR has enjoyed for a full century. The neoconservative Right loves him because in TR's rhetoric and leadership style they perceive the birth pangs of "national greatness conservatism," while the hopeless Left, which weeps over the Bush administration's lawlessness, can be counted on to cheer the lawlessness of TR because, well, his target was big business.

With certain New Left exceptions, moreover, the Left typically celebrates TR's contributions to the federal regulatory apparatus, quaintly taking the comic-book version of the story—why, these agencies were established by disinterested public-sector crusaders to protect the public from unscrupulous businessmen!—at face value. (Why the Left can be withering on the official



rationales given for American foreign policy but views domestic policy with an almost childlike confidence in paternal government is a good question.)

Bill Clinton once referred to Theodore Roosevelt as his favorite Republican president. And no wonder: TR's presidential activism, his frequent use of executive orders to effect policy, and his loathing of nonintervention make him appealing to present-day Democrats and Republicans alike. Clinton went so far as to award TR a posthumous Congressional Medal of Honor, a prize for which TR had unsuccessfully lobbied during his lifetime. ("I am entitled to the Medal of Honor and I want it," he wrote to a friend upon his return from the Spanish-American War.) It was thought at the time that since he had served in the war for a mere two weeks and his exploits had been confined to a single day, he came up short of the requirements for the medal.

Although his writing style can be rather bland, Powell is to be congratulated for carrying out a task that for many years has awaited a capable historian. Powell also acquits himself as a man of principle and courage: at a time when criticism of foreign intervention isn't especially welcome in some conservative and even libertarian circles—where this book is almost certainly being pitched—Powell refuses to shy away from the subject, criticizing both TR's interventionist philosophy as well as the interventions themselves. ("No triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumphs of war," TR said, characteristically, in 1897.)

TR demanded American entry into World War I—as catastrophic a foreign-policy blunder as any American president has ever made—long before Woodrow Wilson made his fateful decision. He inserted into American political discourse the standard platitudes about world leadership: "A nation's first duty is within its own borders, but it is not thereby absolved from facing its duties in the world as a whole; and if it refuses to do so, it merely forfeits its right to struggle for a place among the peoples that shape the destiny of mankind." War, he believed, could be a positive good,

since it encouraged the manly and martial virtues over the flabbiness that besets a nation at peace. Yes, he really said things like that, repeatedly.

Nothing is left standing in the traditional story of TR once Powell completes his careful and relentless study. TR the great trustbuster becomes TR the knave whose arbitrary assaults on business made consumers undoubtedly worse off. TR the great regulator of the railroads becomes TR the destroyer of the railroads through ill-conceived regulation. (If TR really opposed monopoly he would have looked more kindly on the railroads, which undermined many a local monopoly by making products produced elsewhere locally available—and cut land transportation costs in half while doing so.)

To my knowledge, prior to Powell's work there was no systematic overview of TR's environmental policies from the point of view of a supporter of property rights and the market. TR has long been assumed to have had the moral high ground here, and his programs have carelessly been considered beyond reproach. Powell will have none of it.

For instance, Roosevelt lent federal support to reclamation work—irrigation projects and dam construction—in the West, which meant subsidies were being given to make it possible to farm arid land. These projects had the intended effect of encouraging the settlement of the West, though at the cost of an obviously inefficient use of labor and resources. "Large numbers of farmers poured their life savings into irrigation farming," Powell reports, "only to find that it made no sense. They went bankrupt." Even in the face of a dramatic increase in California's population, subsidized irrigation still consumes some 80 percent of the state's water.

The foolishness of these projects, which had bankrupted many a private firm that tried them and gave countless headaches to the states that did likewise, became even clearer in the decade that followed World War I. With agricultural production normalized in Western Europe, demand for American agricul-

tural products declined dramatically. American farmers began to complain of crop surpluses. Meanwhile, Roosevelt had used federal resources to encourage American farming in obviously unsuitable regions. For this we are expected to stand up and cheer?

One way to mollify Midwesterners angry that their tax dollars were going to subsidize the irrigation projects of their western competitors would be to subsidize something of theirs as well. That came in the form of subsidies to improve waterways—which, incidentally, were being used less and less since people typically preferred to use the railroads instead.

The legacy of TR's programs is very much with us today. The Bureau of Reclamation "has built more than six hundred dams around the United States, destroying beautiful valleys, building up salinity in irrigated soil, and drying up rivers. ... The bureau also wastes stupendous amounts of water by building reservoirs in hot, arid regions, where water standing out in the sun simply evaporates." Sierra Club president Adam Werbach told a House subcommittee in 1997 that Arizona's Lake Powell reservoir loses nearly 1 million acre-feet of water every year, enough "for a city the size of Los Angeles."

Powell carries the TR conservation story up to the present in other ways, recording little-known facts about the National Park Service's administration of the national parks and the federal government's unimpressive stewardship of the national forests compared to that of privately owned and managed forests.

Jim Powell's important book confirms that if the American people are ever to emerge from the propaganda fog that surrounds them, a first step must involve the merciless smashing of the icon of Teddy Roosevelt. Then it's on to the rest of the, ahem, great presidents. ■

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# Payback Time



Writing of Imperial Germany in his fine book, *The Pity of War*, historian Niall Ferguson said “the combination of a relatively decentralized

federal system with a democratic national parliament made it more or less impossible for the Reich government to match the defense expenditure of its more centralized neighbors. ... German objectives, had Britain remained out, would not in fact have posed a direct threat to the Empire; the reduction of Russian power in Eastern Europe, the creation of a Central European Customs Union and acquisition of French colonies—there were all goals which were complementary to British interests.”

So much then for the British, French, and American propaganda of the time, which justified the millions of deaths with hysterical talk of German militarism, German imperialism, German quest for world domination, German bestiality. Millions of lives lost, millions maimed for no reason at all. And then one considers the other catastrophic consequences of that unnecessary war: economic depression in Europe, the Bolshevik revolution, Hitler, Stalin, World War II, the Holocaust. Here was a war that achieved no objective and from which no one derived any benefits except for Lenin, who otherwise would have ended his days in obscurity engaged in frenetic polemics with fellow exiles.

Selling a war is a serious business, and no one did it better than the Brits back then. Our present neocons are no slouches either, except they lack the British style of lying. They tend to need lots of makeup on TV because they sweat, and many of them are far too overweight. Never mind. So far only

hundreds of thousands have died in the war on Iraq (655,000 according to the Johns Hopkins study).

Like World War I, this was a war sold on a very big lie. The source of these lies, and thus the people responsible for this catastrophe, are easily identifiable. A small coterie of people ensconced themselves in the Pentagon and seized on the 9/11 terrorist attacks to foist a war on the United States, from which the American people would derive nothing but lost lives and mounting debts and whose only beneficiary was to be Israel.

This coterie set up a secretive group, the Office of Special Plans, whose aim was to frighten Americans into waging war on Iraq. It was overseen by Douglas Feith, then undersecretary of defense, and Feith’s researchers, David Wurmser and Michael Maloof, both protégés of the arch-neocon and war hawk Richard Perle. Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy defense secretary, liked what they showed him, in fact he “was bowled over.”

Knowing that genuine intelligence agencies like the CIA were bound to find out that Saddam had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks, that he was a sworn enemy of al-Qaeda, and that he had ended his weapons of mass destruction programs more than ten years earlier, this little group set out to falsify the intelligence on the basis of which an unnecessary war could be sold to the American people. These conspirators—there is no better word to describe them—had longstanding ties to the Israeli military, the political

establishment, and particularly Benjamin Netanyahu.

In order for history not to repeat itself, some people have to be held responsible. The corruption in postwar Iraq is a major scandal in itself: \$800 million given to the Iraqi government in order to purchase weaponry has gone missing, and not a single person has been held to account. The fact that the Iraqi architect of the war against Saddam, Ahmad Chalabi, was a convicted mega-crook seems to have been forgotten by the administration. If the Democrats prevail in the House of Representatives, a congressional investigation has to be the first priority.

Kevin Tillman, the brother of slain Army Ranger and NFL star Pat Tillman, put it perfectly only last week. He too was an Army Ranger. “Somehow those afraid to fight an illegal invasion [Vietnam] decades ago are allowed to send soldiers to die for an illegal invasion they started.” Hear, hear! Every time I hear of a brave Marine losing his life or his limbs, I think of those smirking neocons on TV who managed to sell the war as if it were snake oil, and I’m compelled to demand justice. These conspirators are as responsible for the horrendous loss of life and the debt that will burden Americans for decades to come as Hitler’s madness was responsible for World War II, as Sir Edward Grey’s Germanophobia for World War I, as William Randolph Hearst’s yellow journalism for the Spanish-American War, as the Kennedy New Frontiersmen’s folly in toppling and assassinating South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem for the American debacle in Vietnam.

It’s payback time, with jail time for those who knowingly lied, and the sooner the better. ■



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